













**SHAKESPEARE**  
**HIS WORLD AND HIS ART**

*Also by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar*

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# SHAKESPEARE

HIS WORLD AND HIS ART

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR



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## CONTENTS

PREFACE	xi
I. 'THE MAN FROM STRATFORD'	
(i) Approaches to Shakespeare	1
(ii) The Range of Shakespeare Studies	6
(iii) The Biographical Problem	10
(iv) Idolatry and Disintegration of the Folio	16
(v) Shakespeare's Marriage	25
(vi) 'Small Latin and Less Greek'	28
II. THE 'TEXT' OF SHAKESPEARE	
(i) The Quartos and the Folios	35
(ii) From Rowe to Furness	39
(iii) 'Editing' Shakespeare	43
(iv) The Role of Conjecture	46
(v) Principles of Emendation	51
(vi) From Textual to Literary Criticism	57
III. THE PROBLEM OF CHRONOLOGY	
(i) External Evidence and Terminal Dates	60
(ii) Internal Evidence	65
(iii) The Chronology of the Plays and Poems	68
(iv) The 'Four-Period' Hypothesis	72
(v) The 'Seven-Period' Divisions	76
(vi) A 'Five-Period' Classification	81
(vii) 'From Here to Eternity'	84
IV. SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND	
(i) Expanding Horizons	90
(ii) Mediaeval and Modern	100
(iii) Drama, Native and Foreign	110
(iv) Playhouses and Companies	118,
(v) 'The Shakespearian Moment'	130

## V. EARLY COMEDY

(i) Pre-Shakespearian Comedy	132
(ii) Classical Influence	136
(iii) <i>The Comedy of Errors</i>	139
(iv) <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	145
(v) <i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	152
(vi) <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>	158
(vii) <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	164

## VI. EARLY TRAGEDY

(i) Moral Causation in Tragedy	172
(ii) Pre-Shakespearian Tragedy	179
(iii) <i>Titus Andronicus</i>	185
(iv) <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	193

## VII. THE LANCASTRIAN TETRALOGY

(i) The History Play	202
(ii) <i>King John</i>	213
(iii) <i>Richard II</i>	220
(iv) <i>1 and 2 Henry IV</i>	223
(v) <i>Henry V</i>	245

## VIII. THE YORKIST TETRALOGY

(i) <i>1 Henry VI</i>	252
(ii) <i>2 Henry VI</i>	258
(iii) <i>3 Henry VI</i>	266
(iv) <i>Richard III</i>	271
(v) 'A General Groan'	279
(vi) <i>Henry VIII</i>	284

## IX. THE POEMS

(i) In the Wake of Ovid	291
(ii) <i>Venus and Adonis</i>	295
(iii) <i>The Rape of Lucrece</i>	300
(iv) <i>Sonnets</i>	306
(v) <i>The Phoenix and the Turtle</i>	323

# CONTENTS

ix

<b>X. ROMANTIC COMEDY</b>	
(i) History, Tragedy, Comedy	328
(ii) The Substance of Romantic Comedy	330
(iii) <i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	338
(iv) <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	347
(v) <i>As You Like It</i>	354
(vi) <i>Twelfth Night</i>	364
(vii) <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	372
<b>XI. THE PROBLEM PLAYS</b>	
(i) A Question of Nomenclature	378
(ii) <i>Julius Caesar</i>	386
(iii) <i>Hamlet, Prince of Denmark</i>	395
(iv) <i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	412
(v) <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>	420
(vi) <i>Measure for Measure</i>	430
<b>XII. GREAT TRAGEDY</b>	
(i) Shakespeare on Tragedy	441
(ii) <i>Othello, the Moor of Venice</i>	454
(iii) <i>King Lear</i>	470
<b>XIII. LATER TRAGEDY</b>	
(i) <i>Timon of Athens</i>	493
(ii) <i>Macbeth</i>	502
(iii) <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	519
(iv) <i>Coriolanus</i>	537
(v) Shakespearian Tragedy	548
<b>XIV. BEYOND TRAGEDY</b>	
(i) Divine Comedy	554
(ii) <i>Pericles, Prince of Tyre</i>	565
(iii) <i>Cymbeline</i>	573
(iv) <i>The Winter's Tale</i>	584
(v) <i>The Tempest</i>	596

## CONTENTS

<b>XV. THE DRAMATIC ARTIST</b>	
(i) The 'Man' and His 'Work': 'Nature' and 'Art'	611
(ii) Construction and Characterisation	623
(iii) 'The Verbal Icon'	646
(iv) Moral Artistry	675
(v) 'God of Our Idolatry'	685
<b>APPENDIX I</b>	
Chronological Table	694
<b>APPENDIX II</b>	
Metrical and other Statistics	698
<b>INDEX</b>	700

## PREFACE

This book is conceived as an introduction to Shakespeare for the general reader, the college student, and the isolated teacher who may find a conspectus like this useful for presenting Shakespeare to his classes. I have accordingly tried to give, in the light of recent scholarship and the trends of modern criticism, both an uncomplicated record of existing knowledge about Shakespeare and a critical study of the poems and all the 37 plays. Scholarship is expected to prepare the way for criticism by 'clearing the decks' as it were; yet criticism cannot wait till scholarship completes the preliminaries. The two activities have thus to go on side by side, making mutual adjustments all the time. Shakespeare scholarship today, pursued simultaneously in several directions, is becoming more and more a global co-operative enterprise, with the major concentrations of activity in U.K. and U.S.A. Our century is supposed to have specialised in what is commonly called 'historical criticism', whose aim is to discover the 'Elizabethan Shakespeare': in other words, to try to see Shakespeare as the Elizabethans saw and understood him. But in the evaluation of the phenomenon that is Shakespearian drama, we have to take note of the Elizabethan 'variables' as well as the human 'constants'. Nor should we forget that it is these 'constants' or universals — which are verily the constituents of quintessential human nature — that make Shakespeare important for us 361 years after the death of Queen Elizabeth the First, and important for us even in far-off India in the quatercentenary year of his birth.

While Shakespeare scholarship seems to call for the play of almost every scientific and humanistic discipline, the profession of Shakespeare criticism requires insight, sensibility and judgement of a high order. "I take it", declared J. Isaacs thirty years ago, that

"the true objects of Shakespeare criticism are (a) to give a picture of the author by tracing his treatment of material so far as it is conscious, or eliciting his unconscious processes; without imposing an autobiography of the critic upon the victim of his inquiries; (b) to give the pattern of the

man and dissect for admiration the beauties he produces, the complexity and explosive force of the poetry, and the deploying and juxtaposition of the characters".

An almost impossible task! Therefore, all that I have tried to do in this book is to preserve some sort of balance between biography, exploration of the backgrounds, discussion of the 'sources', and critical examination — more or less in their chronological order — of the poems and plays. I make no claim to originality; there are no sensational 'discoveries', no definitive 'solutions'. On the other hand, I have not hesitated — where it seemed legitimate and appropriate — to give parallels drawn from Indian life and literature, or to express what my own heart spoke even if it was in defiance of received authoritative opinion.

Shakespeare is undoubtedly the most frequently cultivated field — the most thoroughly churned-up ocean — in 20th century literary scholarship and criticism, and it is unlikely that anything altogether new can now turn up, however persistent our endeavours. There are over 4,000 entries in Ebisch and Schucking's *A Shakespeare Bibliography* (1931), and the bare recital of the conclusions of the aesthetic critics alone runs to some 1,000 tight pages in Augustus Ralli's two-volume *A History of Shakespeare Criticism* (1932). Since the Second World War, the annual *Shakespeare Survey* (17th issue, 1964) and the *Shakespeare Quarterly* (now in its 15th year), not to mention the happily revived German *Jahrbuch*, are steadily adding to the fearful opulence and proliferating complexity of Shakespeare studies. "It is doubtful", said M. W. Black some years ago, "whether any one mind, in the working hours of an ordinary lifetime, will ever again be able to assimilate all that is known about Shakespeare". Other scholars too have expressed themselves in similar terms. While Kenneth Muir complains that "the yearly flood of Shakespeariana submerges all but the strongest swimmers and makes it *increasingly difficult* to see Shakespeare steadily, and see him whole", J. I. M. Stewart moans that "as the industrious years go by, it becomes *increasingly difficult* not only to add to the criticism of Shakespeare, but even to report adequately upon a single aspect of it" (My italics). Again, Louis B. Wright of the Folger Library has recently acknowledged in near-despair :

"The field of Shakespeare criticism today is so vast and has such a ramification of specialised topics, from aesthetic appreciation to Freudian

analysis, that non-specialist literary scholars, much less other folk, find it difficult to sort out the significant from the trivial".

And thus Clifford Leech, in a tone of resignation :

"The burden of Shakespeare criticism has become so grievous that no one today can undertake a general study of the dramatist in the confident belief that he has read, and remembered, everything of value that has already been written concerning his theme. He will be likely, therefore, to come to a point of disregard, trying to see the works by his own light, aided only by those writers who have exercised a special influence upon him".

Which, perhaps, correctly explains my own plight ! It is unlikely we shall ever reach finality about many of the vexed questions relating to Shakespeare, for we know at once too much and too little about him, his world, and his work. The field is full of booby-traps, the ocean full of deceptive currents. What has been garnered and pieced together and postulated about Shakespeare makes such Himalayas of 'facts and problems', argument and exegesis, expostulation and ecstasy, that the appetite of a Saintsbury may quail before the fare, and Atlas himself may feel crushed by the burden. Besides, as Alfred Harbage has pointed out, "everyone who has worked with Elizabethan drama knows how slippery the footing, how difficult to determine simply who wrote what when—with what hazards for honest impulses, what opportunities for dishonest ones". As the mass of publications swells more and more, our certitudes become less and less sharply defined. The circumstance that I was working in remote Waltham, without the facilities of the British Museum or the Bodleian—the Stratford or the Birmingham—the Folger or the Huntington—libraries, although it circumscribed too narrowly and even too arbitrarily the scope of my reading, perhaps also gave me the advantages that Lytton Strachey has claimed for 'ignorance',—for doesn't 'ignorance' simplify and clarify, select and omit, "with a placid perfection unattainable by the highest art?" Even so, the mass of material that I actually had on hand left me repeatedly wondering whether my present attempt wasn't, after all, foredoomed to failure.

My first formal introduction to Shakespeare was in 1922 when, as a schoolboy, I had to read the story of Hamlet in Lamb's *Tales*. Our enterprising teacher, however, read out and explained numer-



out parallel passages from the play itself. In my undergraduate days I had to read as 'prescribed texts' *Julius Caesar*, *Othello* and *The Tempest*, while all Shakespeare came within the purview of the masterate course. Becoming a teacher in Ceylon in 1928, I taught Cambridge School Certificate students *Julius Caesar*, *Henry V*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*. Back in India, for over thirty years (and with hardly any break) I have been reading Shakespeare with my under-graduate or post-graduate students at Belgaum, Bagalkot and Waltair. I must have covered at least twenty-five of the plays in some detail, besides of course lecturing generally on Shakespeare's life and art. Again, one of my earliest review-assignments was H. Somerville's *Madness in Shakespearian Tragedy* (1928), and one of the most recent, A. L. Rowse's *William Shakespeare: A Biography* (1963). Between these two dates, I must have reviewed scores of books on Shakespeare, some at considerable length. In March 1955, I gave a course of three lectures on 'Crime and Punishment in Shakespeare' at the Annamalai University, and followed them with two more, with special reference to the great tragedies, at the Balangir College. The proximity of the quatercentenary year gave me the stimulus to make a new effort, although I knew how full of hazard the undertaking was. I soon gave up my original idea of a restricted monograph on the problem of 'Crime and Punishment in Shakespeare' in favour of a fuller study, and during the summer and autumn months of 1963 I managed to shake myself reasonably free from most other commitments and to get the typescript of the present study ready for the press. I now see that it has been clearly a task beyond my powers, yet it is also true that the writing of the book has helped me to see things I hadn't seen before. Reading the plays and the poems and re-reading them and living with them was certainly a most exhilarating experience; but when presently I turned to the many exercises in explication and interpretation, the shower of light by its very excess had sometimes an almost blinding effect upon me. While the *New Shakespeare* and the *New Arden* have been naturally among the most often consulted, the great critics and the great editors of all our yesterdays have seldom failed me when I was in serious difficulties. The *apparatus criticus*, considering the nature of the subject, has been kept within modest proportions; and although I have tried to

indicate every debt, it is not unlikely that I have here and there unconsciously echoed others' views or failed to make the necessary acknowledgement. As most of the authorities are cited in the footnotes, I have not duplicated the information in a regular Bibliography.

In this the quatercentenary year it is worth remembering that Shakespeare — in the original, in translation, or in adaptation — is still the universal favourite almost everywhere. His plays are read and seen with appreciation in both India and Pakistan. Boris Pasternak devoted some of the best years of his life to rendering Shakespeare into Russian. It is said that, on the eve of its fall in 1945, Shakespeare was performed in Berlin, and presumably *he* doesn't suffer because of the Berlin Wall. And although there are our latter-day innovators in the theatre — Ibsen and Bernard Shaw, O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, Brecht and Eugene Ionesco, Pinter and Samuel Beckett — Shakespeare still manages to win hands down against all competitors old and new. Besides, even in the field of Shakespeare criticism, the notes of violent dissidence are being heard no more. "The spectacle afforded by modern criticism", said Terence Spencer in his British Academy Lecture (1959), "is the shadow-boxing of rival bardolaters. Shakespeare is a dead issue. The resistance to his magnificent tyranny is over; and with it has gone something of the vigour and excitement and courage of Shakespeare criticism". A comet provokes furious discussion, but the Sun is more or less taken for granted. We are sustained by the Sun, we live in its light of life and truth, we daily offer our *sandhya* prayers, but we also take it all very much for granted. As the Shakespearean light streams upon us, we are awakened to the realisation that the natural human bond is the main insurance against the strata-gems of mere egotistical man; the human microcosm, held together by the ties of civility and love and friendship and fellowship (and those obscure motions of the heart and soul that inspire hope and beat back despair), is the essence of the world of Shakespearean drama; and Shakespeare the creator of this world is also himself of a piece with it — an immanent as well as a transcendent Power and Personality. As J. W. Mackail puts it, "the study of Shakespeare returns finally, so far as it can be completed by a single student in a single lifetime, to that assimilation of Shakespeare, that interpenetration with his world, on

which . . . all study of him should be built. The world of Shakespeare may become our world."

I must here record my gratitude to the many batches of students who have patiently 'suffered' my Shakespeare classes. The quotations from Shakespeare are throughout from Peter Alexander's edition; and, besides, his forthright sanity — as revealed in his books and Introductions — has helped me to steer clear of some of the popular whimsies of twentieth century Shakespeare criticism. I was privileged to meet him on my first visit to U.K. in 1951, and the gift of his friendship has been a great inspiration to me all these years. The staff of the Andhra University Library and of the British Council Library at Madras have always readily given me such assistance as was within their means. My daughter, Prema Nandakumar, helped me in various ways while the writing was in progress and, later, by sharing the burden of proof-reading. My son, S. Ambirajan, sent me from U.K. books and journals that I urgently wanted. Messrs. Jupiter Press Private Ltd. have made a good job of printing this book with so many quotations, footnotes, and oddities of spelling. I am also grateful to the Regional Representative of the British Council, Madras, for securing the drawing of the Swan Theatre, and to Mr. Ronald Hall, Librarian of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, for permission to reproduce the 'Grafton Portrait' as frontispiece to the book. Even as the 'Swan' gives us a plausible enough image of the 'Globe', we would very much like to see in the 'Grafton Portrait' (taking our cue from John Dover Wilson and the late John Semple Smart) the very image of the 'Young Shakespeare' — Shakespeare, aged 24, in 1588, the year of the Armada. The coincidence is, indeed, too good and too striking *not* to be true!

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

Andhra University, Waltair

## CHAPTER I

### 'THE MAN FROM STRATFORD'

#### I

#### APPROACHES TO SHAKESPEARE

When a subject is as 'large' as Shakespeare, adventuring into its domain is like the attempt to explore the riches of an ocean. It seems so easy, so tempting, at first. You may begin at any point of the hither shore and press forward, bravely, enthusiastically. But soon you are out of your depth, you are caught and tossed by the waves, you are nearly lost. A great Shakespearean scholar who recently passed away told me in 1951 : " I'm turning to other subjects. Shakespeare has a way of exhausting and swallowing up his critics. I'm retracing my steps in time ". To be piloted across the ocean that is Shakespeare by an adept like Dowden or Bradley, Dover Wilson or Peter Alexander, Alfred Harbage or Hardin Craig, is no doubt both exciting and comforting, for each great Shakespearean critic is a master mariner who valiantly effects a passage to the furthest shores of understanding and enjoyment, making his way through the mists and storms and the many hidden rocks or largely hidden icebergs that are apt to confuse or overwhelm the unlucky or the unwary ; and he is willing to carry us too in his magic bark, if we are prepared to entrust ourselves to his care. On the other hand, the boats vary in tonnage and seaworthiness, they follow diverse routes, and reach different points on the other side ; and although a passage has been made somehow, the ocean itself stubbornly defies comprehension. A tiny pond has a neat brevity of its own, and soon yields up its mysteries ; but an ocean's total contents defy measurement, its depths elude any sounding by the plummet. It is an

endless mystery, an endless challenge to adventurous humanity. And not to the adventurous alone, for even the timid can venture waist-deep into the ocean and wistfully gaze at the immense expanse, the overhanging clouds, the orange streaks of revelation where the heavens seem to meet the earth. The human mind, in its endeavour to seize Infinity, is only too ready to affirm : " This handful is the All " — like the blind men who equated the ear, the leg, the tail or the proboscis alone with the Elephant. Men must needs rest content with a part if the whole is beyond their reach ; and partial knowledge, so long as it is seen to be such, is not without its use to the questing human spirit. Thus no Shakespearian, however ill-equipped or inexperienced, however timid or faltering in his approaches, need be quite shut out of the assembly of the Faithful. All honest Shakespearians are advancing the good cause, though not to an equal degree.

If Shakespeare studies strike us increasingly as the ocean, or all the oceans, the quintessential Shakespeare is a very Everest who lures us all only to baffle us all. Even when happily endowed climbers like Hunt and Tensing touch Everest, they must almost immediately withdraw, and the experience of the ' conquest ' is no more than a memory, a dream, — an emotion recollected and re-lived in the tranquillity of after-hours or after-years. What is the secret of that power of utterance that with a few words (" Pray you undo this button ") causes a pang or in a couple of lines —

She sat like Patience on a monument,  
Smiling at grief —

creates a human being, to become a part of us for ever ? What sort of person, what sort of dramatist, was this ' Man from Stratford ' ? Was he the apostle of collective order or of uncompromising individuality ? Was he more successful as a plotter of dramatic actions or as a creator of memorable characters, as a weaver of golden fancies or merely as a magnificent craftsman in verse ? Was he a moralist, or an artist, or a moralist doubled with an artist ? Was the symbolist more than the dramatist, the myth-maker more than the man of the theatre ? Perhaps Shakespeare really exceeded all our prim critical categories, at once including and transcending them to our complete discomfiture ! When Shakespeare speaks to us at his characteristic best, as in the

following speech by Isabella, criticism is dumb and awed ecstasy is the only proper response :

Could great men thunder  
As Jove himself does, Jove would never be quiet,  
For every pelting petty officer  
Would use his heaven for thunder,  
Nothing but thunder. Merciful Heaven,  
Thou rather, with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt,  
Splits the unwedgeable and gnarled oak  
Than the soft myrtle. But man, proud man,  
Dress'd in a little brief authority,  
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,  
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
As makes the angels weep ; who, with our spleens,  
Would all themselves laugh mortal.

(*MM*, II, ii, 110)<sup>1</sup>

Is it the way divine contrasted with the way of the world, Jove's way with the petty officer's way — is it the visioning of the double possibility before man, growing into a god or relapsing into the ape — is it the projection of the drama that is a Tragedy could we feel it with a heart of divine compassion, and mere Comedy should we vent on it our human spleen? Critics gaze at the Himalayan ranges that are the various plays, now from this angle now from that, now feel their vision blocked by a passing cloud of controversy, now almost glimpse the snow-capped tops in unbelieving wonder. But how shall we methodically negotiate our way to Everest, or even to the lesser heights in its vicinity? Many must labour, but the guerdon is reserved for the few. But the striving — although the attempt is very likely foredoomed to failure — can never be wholly in vain.

When a massed strength and might is viewed from a particular angle, a certain clarity or simplicity seems to impose itself on the piled up vastness and complexity. While this suggestion of clarity or simplicity is welcome as a means of brevity, it would nevertheless be misleading to talk as though the pattern we see had been deliberately laid in the beginning of things, as though 'form' and 'rhythm' are antecedent to 'life'. We talk of the evolution of the idea of Tragedy or Comedy in Shakespeare's plays, and the

<sup>1</sup> The text used throughout is Peter Alexander's edition of Shakespeare's Complete Works (1951).

discussion is not without value so long as it is seen to be no more than a convenient mode of critical exploration. Shakespeare wrote 36 or 37 plays in the course of 20-25 years. At first he seems to have promiscuously tried his hand at Tragedy, Comedy, History, Farce; then, for a few years, he was engrossed in the Lancastrian tetralogy and the Comedies. With the turn of the century, as with the end of autumn, came the season of sore trials and seeming sterility and defeat, and this season saw the procession of the great Tragedies, and the three strangely disturbing plays, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*. Towards the end the sky seemed to clear again, the icy season was over, and the sticky leaves of spring, the first buds of promise and new fulfilment, were symbolised in the heroines of the last plays, — in Marina, Imogen, Perdita and Miranda. And so Shakespeare — the revels ended, as far as *he* was concerned — returned to Stratford-upon-Avon and rejoined his family for good. The four-period hypothesis, originally associated with Furnivall and Dowden, but since put forward by many others in one or another form, is doubtless a means of ready convenience, and becomes misleading and perverse only when stated in an extreme form as if Shakespeare had programmed it all in advance and methodically executed a series of 4 Five Year Plans. "We must be very wary", says George Gordon, "how we apply such labels, such demarcations, to so mobile a thing as the life and work of a man. Shakespeare's mind had a history, and his art had a history: neither of them straightforward, or probably clear to himself: but at any rate a moving history, not to be thus confined".<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare was no superlatively self-conscious experimenter or researcher, perfecting his art as scientists perfect techniques in a laboratory; but there is no doubt that his art gained in power as he grew older and acquired new graces at the expense of others incompatible with them, and there was certainly a growing awareness of life's complexity and variety, a greater insight into the workings of the human mind and heart, and a richer music and a more piercing quality in his poetic expression. The 2nd Lord says in *All's Well* (IV. iii. 67):

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together. Our virtues would be proud if our faults whipt them not; and our crimes would despair if they were not cherish'd by our virtues.

<sup>2</sup> *Shakespearian Comedy* (1944), pp. 43-4.

Here's the key to Shakespeare's world, and the clue to the labyrinthine involutions of his mind and the baffling vicissitudes of his dramatic career. It is not as though we pass from room to room, from the higgledy-piggledy store-room stacked with odds and ends to the lounge where fireplace, piano, settee, radio chime together perfectly; from the lounge to the sick-chamber where lie men and women diseased in body or soul, where death at last loses its sting, and the dying hero — or heroine — is seen clutching at immortality. From the sick room to another lounge upstairs, more subdued in its lighting but not less soothing to tired limbs and jaded minds, a veritable haven of comfort and peace. No: it is the same room all the time, and it is crowded with human beings who come and go, people compounded of virtues and capable of crimes; the bits of furniture are now heaped in confusion, and now they are arranged in some order; the room now darkens as the sky lours outside, now it brightens up as the Sun emerges from a cluster of clouds: it is only the artist that is maturing and mellowing in the pursuit of his calling. Neither clowns nor villains are the privileged inhabitants of one particular 'period' alone; they are there always, though they do shift their positions somewhat and change their robes and vary their gestures. There is the Porter in *Macbeth*, the Fool in *King Lear*; there are the grave-diggers in *Hamlet*, the watchmen in *Much Ado*, and the shepherds in *The Winter's Tale*. If Aaron figures in *Titus Andronicus* and Iago in *Othello*, if Richard Crookback and the bastard, Edmund, are like them architects of evil, how about Don John in the comedy, *Much Ado*, and Iachimo in the romance, *Cymbeline*? There is usurpation in the Yorkist and Lancastrian tetralogies, and also in later plays like *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*; sexual jealousy figures in many plays — *Much Ado*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* — though the circumstances are different; and 'reconciliation' is the end-note, not only of the last plays, but also of earlier plays like *Much Ado*, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*. The web of Shakespearian drama is of a mingled yarn, not only good and ill together, but also laughter and tears, romance and realism, comedy and tragedy. It is a subtly woven web too, at once intricate and delicate, variety wedded to complexity, a background unity and strength sustaining the visible flux and confusion. In Jean Paris's words:



"No division here interrupts the thread of existence. The most hilarious interlude links the crime to the punishment. . . . laments are seasoned with puns. There is no tragedy without a smile and vice versa, no pleasure without sorrow. . . . if the differences among all these plays are not so great as we tend to believe, it is because there is a basic unity underlying every circumstance, every expression. . . . Thus the most varied theatre becomes, paradoxically, the site of supreme identity. Which is another way of saying that, beneath their trappings, comedy, history, and tragedy all reveal a single secret, a single purpose".<sup>3</sup>

It is permissible to survey Shakespeare's work chronologically, it is convenient to study it facet by facet : only let us not claim too much for our critical surveys or analytical appraisals. The integral vision, the total view, is alone the consummation devoutly to be wished for. The rest is a means to that end, and must therefore serve to further that end.

## II

### THE RANGE OF SHAKESPEARE STUDIES

But how is the 'integral vision', the 'total view', to be cultivated or achieved? With a writer like Shakespeare — a writer and not a short-hand symbol for a committee of authors — we wish to know something of his life, we wish to read his works in the form in which he originally wrote them, and we wish to study them in the context of his life and environment and also in a timeless or universal context ; in other words, we wish to grasp their meaning in relation to the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth and to apprehend their significance in relation to eternity. His world, his life, his work, — the individualist, the universalist, — all must somehow be comprised in our vision, fused in our image of Shakespeare. Of Valmiki and Homer we know next to nothing ; of Goethe and Byron, of Ibsen and Tolstoy, of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, we know practically everything. These extreme phenomena set fewer problems to the literary student than Shakespeare. We can surrender to the *Ramayana*, and forget its creator (or creators) ; with Byron, on the other hand, we can if we choose prefer 'poetolatry' to the poetry. But with Shakes-

<sup>3</sup> *Shakespeare*, translated from the French by Richard Seaver (Evergreen Profile Book, 1960), pp. 85-6.

peare we are really in a quandary. We know a little about him, and according to George Steevens the 18th century editor this little is very little indeed :

"All that we know of Shakespeare is that he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, married, and had children there ; went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote plays and poems ; returned to Stratford, made his will, and died".

Our curiosity is roused but not satisfied. "What we do not know about Shakespeare is a most fascinating subject, and one that would fill a volume", said Oscar Wilde, "but what we do know about him is so meagre and inadequate that when it is collected together the result is disappointing". The researcher's energies are fully engaged but not always rewarded ; and either he bravely perseveres in the seemingly hopeless task or turns away from Shakespeare to a more manageable author or problem. But there are also scholars who refuse to be so daunted or dispirited, who are if necessary willing to practise the virtue of resolved limitation. Such critics are unhurried, they wield with equal mastery the weapon of the dialectic and also the sensitive tuning fork of imaginative sympathy ; they are ready to advance or retreat as the occasion may require ; they are moles, fighters, and builders rolled into one. Such men are duly rewarded by the feeling that they have reclaimed some small area at least from the reign of Chaos and Old Night. Scholarship at its best is a matter of consecration, and the great Shakespearians are entitled to our deathless gratitude for the devotion with which they have pursued their labours.

The 'common reader', of course, starts with the plays themselves in a suitable modern edition, and there is no dearth of editions of the Complete Works or of the individual plays. Why cannot we have an authorised edition—like the Authorised Version of the Bible—and be done with the problem once and for all ? But even the Authorised Version is now giving place to the new 'Revised' Version, and the circumstances under which Shakespeare wrote his plays make a truly definitive edition of his plays unrealisable. Shaw personally supervised the issue of the collected edition of his plays and prefaces, and even Ben Jonson issued in his own lifetime his 'Collected Works'. But Shakespeare took no such interest in his writings. Perhaps death intervened before he could see the job through, — before he could even

start work on it. After all, he was only 52 when he died ; and at 52, one is apt to think that one has long years ahead to attend to the labours of revision, proof-reading, and supervision of publication. He died too soon, and so the plays had to be put together and given to the world by other hands. Further, as Shakespeare didn't figure till less than a century ago as a compulsory 'subject' in school and college, in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries people read Shakespeare for pleasure or enlightenment rather than for passing examinations or for obtaining Doctorate Degrees. The demand for the plays was there, no doubt, and the demand was steadily increasing ; and successive editions came out, not always zealously supervised. Each editor "corrected some errors and added some more", as the author of a scientific primer once confessed in his Prefatory Note with unconscious irony. By and by, Shakespeare was seen to be a universalist, scholars and researchers got busy, light and darkness contended for mastery ; and while doubtless we are advancing inch by inch as it were, we shall never arrive, it seems, at the perfect text or achieve the completely convincing picture of Shakespeare's life. It is rather like one of those exasperating phenomena in mathematics, one of those limiting series, where the nearer we approach the goal the more unrealisable seems the goal itself. So near, yet so tantalisingly beyond reach ! "The excuse for the innumerable volumes on Shakespeare", writes Allardyce Nicoll, "rests in the fact that the wonder which is in him defies exact description, that it constantly reveals fresh facets and that we can hardly imagine a time when we shall have exhausted the magic and become absolute masters of the mystery".<sup>4</sup> Yet therein too lies the thrill and the romance of the chase, the pang of possible total failure, the throb of probable imminent triumph.

Shakespeare — the Man and his Work — is a single theme, though we may often seek to split it up in practice. With Peter Alexander's *Shakespeare's Life and Art* (1939) in his mind, C. J. Sisson points out that the moral of the book, and of similar books, is in the title : "it is in vain to attempt to separate historical fact from the writings of a poet, which are also facts in their own right, in the records of a great life".<sup>5</sup> Variety and opulence are the distinguishing 'marks' of the immense mass of writing

<sup>4</sup> *Shakespeare* (1952), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 3, p. 8.

that goes by the name of ‘Shakespeare Criticism’, and although the student may be baffled at first by all this spate of speculation and specialism, he will soon realise that every exhibit, excepting the utterly fantastic, has an integral relation to the central theme. The circumference of Shakespearian scholarship is stretching out further and further,—yet the centre miraculously holds all together. There are studies that attempt to reconstruct Shakespeare’s life — his ‘external’ life in so far as it may be inferred from local gossip or contemporary records ; and there are studies that attempt to portray his ‘inner’ life in so far as it may be inferred from his own writings — the plays, the poems, and the sonnets. From Shakespeare the Man it is but natural that we should proceed to a study of his backgrounds, intellectual, social, political, linguistic : in other words, to endeavour to see Shakespeare in relation to his time, the actors and playwrights who were his contemporaries, the Companies with which he was associated, the theatres wherein his plays leapt into life, the printing houses where his plays often went through a veritable sea-change, the conventions of his time which he couldn’t reject, the climate of thought which proved so favourable to the full blossoming of his genius, the Elizabethan ‘world-picture’ that was half a limiting frame-work and half an ‘enchanted glass’ opening limitless vistas to his imagination. When we turn to Shakespeare’s own writings at last, various questions arise at once : authenticity of the ‘texts’ and the order of composition of the plays ; the problems of revision, collaboration, and corruption ; Shakespeare’s handwriting, spelling, and punctuation ; ‘piracy’ and the unauthorised publication of the plays. When we are sure of the text, we turn to the study of the dramatic artist who achieved mastery of the three main genres in drama, namely Comedy, History, Tragedy ; of the craftsman who by the subtle alchemy of his intellect and imagination transmuted the freely borrowed material into burnished gold ; of the master-builder of ‘plots’, of the uncanny delineator of human character, of the poet who breathed Promethean fire into story, character and utterance to make them fuse into a living unity. We may study too the poet’s imagery and versification, his spirals of meaning, his topical significances, his verbal wizardry ; we may discuss his use of the ‘aside’ and the ‘soliloquy’, of music and song ; or we may inquire into the role of the abnormal or the supernatural in this theatre whose aim is essentially to hold

the mirror upto Nature. Perhaps one should round the course off with a study of the vicissitudes of Shakespeare criticism during the last 350 years, — a miniature history of literary taste, in fact. Biography, history, textual criticism, literary criticism, literary detection,<sup>6</sup> psychology (even psycho-analysis), statistics, palaeography, iconography, imaginative identification, — all are involved in the process; but the *end* is the same.

### III

#### THE BIOGRAPHICAL PROBLEM

Towards the close of the 19th century, Shakespeare criticism and Shakespearian scholarship seemed to have achieved something like sureness and stability. Even as the Victorians believed that Utopia was almost round the corner, Shakespearian scholars too must have fondly believed or hoped that there was not much more to be done in the field. There appeared, in 1875, Dowden's *Shakspeare: His Mind and Art*, justly described by J. Isaacs as "the first book in English to give anything like a unified and rounded picture of the whole achievement of the dramatist".<sup>7</sup> The arrangement of the plays by Heminge and Condell in the First Folio (1623) gives no clue to the order in which Shakespeare had written them. It was Malone who first set himself the task of ascertaining the order, and he made many shrewd guesses. The researches of later scholars (Fleay, Herzberg, Conrad and others) and the enunciation and application of the so-called metrical tests helped to define with reasonable certainty the chronology of the plays. The indefatigable Fleay came out with the aggressive manifesto:

"We must adopt every scientific method from other sciences applicable to our ends. From the mineralogist we must learn to recognise a chip of rock from its general appearance; from the chemist, to apply systematic tabulated tests to confirm our conclusions; from the botanist we must learn to classify; finally, from the biologist we must learn to take into

<sup>6</sup> The late J. M. Robertson published a book with the title *Literary Detection: A Symposium on 'Macbeth'* (1931).

<sup>7</sup> Granville-Barker & G. B. Harrison (Eds.), *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies* (1934), p. 301.

account, not only the state of any writer's mind at some one epoch, but to trace its organic growth from beginning to end of his period of work".

As the good work progressed and the findings accumulated, the methods of inductive logic were brought into full play: and, lo and behold, "chaos gave way to order; and, for the first time, critics became able to judge, not only of the individual works, but of the whole succession of the works of Shakespeare".<sup>8</sup> Dowden's four-period theory — 'In the Workshop', 'In the World', 'Out of the Depths', and 'On the Heights' — received general acceptance, while his compact *Primer*<sup>9</sup> brought his conclusions well within the reach of school-boy and 'common reader' alike. The Cambridge Shakespeare, edited by Glover, Clark and Wright, had in the meantime achieved what was thought to be the definitive text of the plays, and indeed its vogue as the more popular 'Globe' edition in one volume has been altogether phenomenal. Further, Sir Sidney Lee's *A Life of William Shakespeare* (1898) and A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) seemed almost to strike the note of finality and rounded fulfilment. Was the subject exhausting itself, after all?

At the beginning of our century, then, there appeared to be a broad measure of agreement in the divers realms of Shakespearean scholarship and criticism. Sidney Lee, for example, was able to assert that "the obscurity with which Shakespeare's biography has long been credited is greatly exaggerated. The mere biographical information accessible is far more definite and more abundant than that concerning any other dramatist of the day". William Shakespeare (the third child of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden) was born, probably on 23rd April 1564 (St. George's Day), at Stratford-upon-Avon, and was certainly baptised in the local parish church on 26 April. He studied (mainly Latin) in the Stratford Grammar School, and was withdrawn from it at the age of 13 or 14. He married Anne Hathaway of Shottery, a woman eight years his senior, in 1582. A daughter, Susanna, was born next year; and the twins, Hamnet and Judith, followed in

<sup>8</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Literary Essays* (1948), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Each generation needs a *Primer* suited to its own mental climate. Dowden's *Primer* (1877) was followed by Raleigh's volume in the EML Series in 1907; Dover Wilson's *The Essential Shakespeare* came out in 1932; and the latest is Peter Alexander's *A Shakespeare Primer* (1951), a succinct account of Shakespeare's life and work, sustained by logic, learning, and mature critical insight.

1585. Between 1585 and 1592 were the 'lost years' of Shakespeare's life, and it was anybody's guess how Shakespeare spent his time during this period or what he did to support himself and his family.<sup>10</sup> It was assumed too, on the strength of Ben Jonson's ambiguous phrase, that Shakespeare had but "small Latin and less Greek". However, he must have been a high-spirited and impetuous lad (didn't he rush into marriage at the age of 18?), and perhaps he was once involved in a case of deer-lifting in Sir Thomas Lucy's park. Whether because the enraged Baronet made it too hot for young Shakespeare or because he felt the pressure of straitened circumstances, he left Stratford for London — probably after the birth of the twins in 1585 — to start life anew. Even if he sojourned elsewhere for a time, it would be in the fitness of things if Shakespeare could have reached London in 1588, the *annus mirabilis* that saw the destruction of the Spanish Armada!

The next sure landmark was the dying Greene's jealous outburst in his *A Groatworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance* (1592):

"Yes trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Iohannes fac totum*, is in his owne conceit the only Shake-scene in a country".

This was addressed to Greene's fellow dramatists as a warning against the ingratitude of actors in general and of an actor-playwright like Shakespeare in particular. Since Malone's time, the above passage was taken to mean that Shakespeare had freely lifted lines (or whole passages) from Greene and probably from others as well; and thus Greene's indictment was that this actor-playwright was really a shameless plagiarist. Anyhow, by 1592, Shakespeare was in London, and was obviously thriving. It was thought that he must have begun his career as a reviser of other people's plays, even if he was not actually a plagiarist; hence the "Workshop" hypothesis put forward by Dowden and accepted by others. On the other hand, circumstances undoubtedly favoured Shakespeare: Greene died on 3 September 1592, soon after the

<sup>10</sup> In *Sergeant Shakespeare*, Duff Cooper has even tried to prove that Shakespeare served as Sergeant-at-arms under Leicester in the Low Countries.

publication of his notorious pamphlet; Marlowe died in 1593, probably as the result of a drunken brawl; Kyd died in 1594, and Peele (who hadn't written plays for 2 or 3 years) in 1596; Lyly's career as a playwright had ended in 1590, Nashe retired from playwriting, and Lodge was busy with litigation against his brother. Thus by 1595 the 'University Wits' were either dead or were completely quiescent. Jonson, Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, Chapman, Heywood and Dekker hadn't yet arrived; and so the 'interim' was Shakespeare's, and he pressed his advantage to the full. He wrote the Histories and the Comedies; he plunged into the 'depths' of Tragedy; and presently, by an effort of will as it were, he landed 'on the Heights' of Romance. He was so well established as a power in the theatre by 1600 that he could face the competition from the new dramatists with equanimity. He bought property (including 'New Place', the largest house in Stratford, in 1597), he obtained the family Coat of Arms in 1596<sup>11</sup>; his income as a dramatist averaged £35 a year and as an actor £130 a year (corresponding in present-day currency to about £750 and £2,000 respectively), though in later years his income averaged £600 a year. He married his daughter, Susanna, to Dr. John Hall in 1607, retired to Stratford in 1618, and died there, soon after the marriage of Judith his second daughter, on 23rd April 1616. He had just completed his fifty-second year.

Years passed. Several of Shakespeare's plays (sixteen at least) were in circulation in the form of Quartos, which had been published in Shakespeare's own life-time. Jaggard republished some of the plays in 1619, and *Othello* came out as a Quarto in 1622. It was, however, Heminge and Condell — Shakespeare's friends and fellow-actors — who undertook the monumental task of 'collecting' all his plays and bringing them out as a single 'omnibus' volume. The (First) Folio of 1623 (containing 36 plays, but not the poems and the sonnets) was the impressive result of their labours. In their address "to the Great Variety of Readers", Heminge and Condell claimed for their edition of the plays unique authority:

"It had been a thing, we confess, worthie to have bene wished, that the Author himselfe had liv'd to have set forth, and overseen his owne

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 'The Queen and Mr. Shakespeare', a fanciful one-act play by David Scott Daniell.



writings; But since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to haue collected & publish'd them; and so to haue publish'd them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diuerse stolne, and surreptitious eopies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of inurious impostors, that expos'd them; even these, are now offer'd to your view eur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceiued them".

This was taken to mean that the editors had branded all the Quartos as "stolne and surreptitious", although closer scrutiny showed that some of the plays in the Folio (for example, *Much Ado*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Dream*) had been practically reprinted from the respective Quartos. Evidently, Heminge and Condell had been protesting too much! This, added to Greene's outburst, and the interpretation that Malone and his successors had put upon it, made scholars question the authority of the Folio itself. How much of the 'Workshop' period had been included by Heminge and Condell? How much of other people's work had they passed off as Shakespeare's? The country lad with "small Latin and less Greek" couldn't have written in their cntirety 1/2 & 3 *Henry VI*, with their weight of historical knowledge, or *Titus Andronicus*, *The Comedy of Errors* and *Love's Labour's Lost* with their burden of classical allusions. He needed time and experience to master his craft and tunc his instruments aright. Hadn't we, then, better confine our attention to the 'mature' Shakespeare of the Lancastrian tetralogy, the 7 or 8 great Tragedies, and the Comedies and the Romances? Here was the real essential Shakespeare, the eternal transcendental Shakespeare!

Even as the Shakespearian pseudo-orthodoxy was thus defining itself, the other doxies too started lifting their tails and gleefully wagging them. If Shakespeare was but a country lad, with no intellectual accomplishments worth mention, he certainly couldn't have written the Plays — neither the earlier nor the maturer plays, nor indeed *any* of the plays or poems or sonnets. The distance between the Man from Stratford and the genius that brooded over the great plays was so great as to imply a hoax or a blunder. Somebody else — Lord Bacon, perhaps, or Lord Oxford, Fulke Grenville, Sir Edward Dyer, Sir Walter Raleigh, the Countess of Pembroke, the Earl of Rutland, or Lord Derby — must have written them and passed them off as Shakespeare's with his con-

nivance (purchased, of course, for a consideration). Some 50-60 candidates have been put forward so far, and these include even Elizabeth and at the other extreme — Anne Whateley, as also Cardinal Wolsey, Edmund Spenser, Ben Jonson, and John Donne ; but of course Bacon's sponsors have been the most pugnacious. The Baconian authorship of the Plays was first suggested by an American, John Hart, in 1848 in a book entitled *The Romance of Yachting* ; and it has been maintained by many since then that Bacon was really Queen Elizabeth's son, that he was a Freemason, and that it was he that wrote the Plays and Sonnets erroneously attributed to Shakespeare. The overwhelming psychological (or aesthetic) objection to the Baconian theory is that his cast of mind was quite different from that of the author of the Plays. If, indeed, Bacon wrote Shakespeare, then (as a humorist once argued) Shakespeare wrote Bacon : the same author couldn't possibly have written both the Plays in the Folio and a treatise like *Novum Organum*. Derby's candidature is slightly more plausible, for he did write some comedies, and his brother, Lord Strange, had a company of actors which might have included Shakespeare at one time, thus giving Derby an opportunity to know (and make use of) the Man from Stratford.<sup>12</sup> Lord Oxford (Edward de Vere) too wrote poems and comedies, but he was 14 years older than Shakespeare and even otherwise a most unlikely person to have written his Plays. Rutland, on the contrary, was 12 years younger, and however precocious he might have been, he still couldn't have written Shakespeare's plays. New claimants to the authorship of 'Shakespeare' are coming forward, among the latest being Marlowe himself. Calvin Hoffman, an American theatre critic and the author of the Marlovian theory, roundly asserts that Marlowe didn't die in 1593 but was secretly spirited away to Donai in North France by his

<sup>12</sup> The case for Derby was first put forward by Professor Le Franc, and has since been elaborated in *Shakespeare's Identity* (1952), by Dr. A. W. Titherley. A reviewer of this book wrote : "His case appears to be insusceptible of succinct expression". The Oxford theory is associated with Percy Allen, Eva Turner, Thomas Looney and others. Nor have the Baconians been silenced yet, for there are (it appears) 600 volumes and pamphlets on the Baconian theory alone in the Shakespeare Memorial Library at Birmingham, and more are being added year by year. Since many of the non-Stratfordians ('deviationists') rely upon 'ciphers' to make out their case, William F. Friedman and Elizebeth Friedman have exposed the inadequacy of these 'ciphers' in their book, *The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined* (1957).

patron, one of the Walsinghams, to save him from imminent prosecution on charges of atheism, heresy and high treason. Later, he was brought back secretly and kept concealed in Walsingham's House, Scadbury Park, at Chislehurst. It was here that Marlowe composed *Venus and Adonis* and all the other works now attributed to Shakespeare. Even the Folio of 1623 was sponsored by Walsingham as a memorial to his lifelong friend, Marlowe!

Most of these theories are ably discussed and disposed of in R. C. Churchill's *Shakespeare and His Betters* (1958) and the more recent *The Shakespeare Claimants* (1962) by H. N. Gibson. There is also the Folger Booklet, *The Authorship of Shakespeare* (1961), by James McManaway, who reaches the just conclusion that Shakespeare *was* clearly known and accepted by his contemporaries (like 'Rare Ben', for example) as the author of the Plays and also as the Man from Stratford. The supposed 'lie' was no more than the simple truth.

#### IV

#### IDOLATRY AND DISINTEGRATION OF THE FOLIO

While the biographical heresy that 'Shakespeare didn't write Shakespeare' was thus assuming varying shapes, the modern revolution in Shakespeare criticism and Shakespearian scholarship started in other quarters. In 1904, Lytton Strachey — then a young man of 24 — attacked in the course of a brilliant essay the main assumptions behind Dowden's 'Four Period' hypothesis. A play needn't necessarily reflect the mind of its author, for drama was not autobiography. Even supposing that each play that Shakespeare wrote reflects the state of his mind at the time he composed it, are the inferences implied in Dowden's hypothesis altogether valid? Do the plays of the last period — *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* — really reveal a Shakespeare perched "on the Heights"? Do they point to a Shakespeare (in Furnivall's words) "forgiven and forgiving, full of the highest wisdom and peace, at one with family and friends and foes, in harmony with Avon's flow and Stratford's level meads"? Strachey's own view of Shakespeare in the last years of his life was a very different one:

"Half enchanted by visions of beauty and loveliness, and half bored to death; on the one side inspired by a soaring fancy to the singing of ethereal songs, and on the other urged by a general disgust to burst occasionally through his torpor into bitter and violent speech ..."<sup>13</sup>

Presently, E. E. Stoll of Minnesota and Levin Schucking of Breslau raised the banner of revolt against romantic criticism,<sup>14</sup> which had had an almost continuous run from Morgann (1777) to Bradley (1904) via Hazlitt, Coleridge, De Quincey, Lamb, Victor Hugo and Swinburne. On the other hand, Frank Harris gave full rein to his imagination and made his astonishing book *The Man Shakespeare* (1909) an entertaining jumble of critical fantasy and the wildest biographical speculation. The crystallising certitudes of 19th century Shakespeare criticism thus suddenly underwent a rapid dissolution to the discomfiture of 'orthodoxy'.

It was nevertheless in the apparently arid field of textual criticism that the most revolutionary, as also the most fruitful, discoveries were made. The great names here are A. W. Pollard, W. W. Greg, R. B. McKerrow, Dover Wilson and Peter Alexander. Heminge and Condell's reference to the "stolne and surreptitious" copies had been too readily or lazily taken to imply a condemnation of *all* Quartos — a double lapse because some of the Quartos were not only good in themselves but had also been practically reproduced in the Folio. In his *Shakespeare's Folios and Quartos* (1909) and *Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates*, Pollard — doubtless benefiting by certain hints thrown out by two 18th century editors, Capell and Malone — earnestly addressed himself to this problem, and persuasively made out a case for separating the "good" sheep from the "bad" goats, and also put forth the view, now universally accepted, that Heminge and Condell's detraction of the Quartos must have applied only to the four "bad" ones, viz., *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry V* and *Hamlet*.<sup>15</sup> The fourteen "good" Quartos, on the contrary, were regularly entered in the Stationers' Register, and

<sup>13</sup> *Literary Essays*, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Shakespeare Studies* (1927) by E. E. Stoll and *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays* (1922) by Levin Schucking.

<sup>15</sup> *Pericles* (1609) was another "bad" Quarto, but the play was not included in the First Folio. Sailendra Kumar Sen, in his *Capell and Malone, and Modern Critical Bibliography* (1960), has shown how these two 18th century editors saw the importance of both the First Folio and the first editions of the (good) Quartos, thus perceiving some of the basic principles of modern critical bibliography.

had presumably received the personal attention, if not the active supervision, of Shakespeare himself. The claim of Heminge and Condell had thus meant no more than the substitution of the authoritative texts for the mangled texts of the "bad" Quartos. While Pollard thus laid the foundations of the new bibliographical and textual study of Shakespeare's plays, Percy Simpson, in his monograph on Shakespeare's punctuation, made the useful distinction between grammatical and playhouse punctuation, instances of the latter being abundant in the Quartos and the Folios :

"Modern punctuation is, or at any rate attempts to be, logical ; the earlier system was merely rhythmical... Modern punctuation is uniform ; the old punctuation was quite the reverse... a flexible system of punctuation enabled him (the poet) to express subtle differences in tone".<sup>16</sup>

Of the three elements (spelling, verse arrangement and punctuation) that give the Folio its unique individuality and authority, Simpson looked upon punctuation ("which is usually regarded as the weakest point in the printing of the Folio") as being "on the whole sound and reasonable".<sup>17</sup> Again, Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, in his study of Shakespeare's Handwriting (1916), subjected the MS of *Sir Thomas More*, now in the British Museum, to a rigorous scientific analysis in the light of our knowledge of Shakespeare's known signatures, and concluded that 3 pages in the MS are definitely in Shakespeare's own handwriting.<sup>18</sup> This was no mean help to critics in their attempts to decide which letters and combinations of letters were most likely to mislead compositors and result in corrupt readings of the texts.<sup>19</sup> Shakespeare's pronunciation too has been the subject of a careful inquiry by Helge Kokeritz of Yale. On the basis of what he calls the 'orthoepistic', the 'orthographic', the 'metrical' and the 'rhyme' evidence, he has been able to draw certain broad conclusions regarding "the sum total of phonetic features that characterised the speech of William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon and London".<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Shakespearean Punctuation*, pp. 8, 10.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15. A more recent study of the subject is Peter Alexander's British Academy Lecture, *Shakespeare's Punctuation* (1945).

<sup>18</sup> The Appendix to Alexander's edition of Shakespeare's Complete Works contains in type-facsimile these 147 lines from *Sir Thomas More*.

<sup>19</sup> For example, "of a" for "often", omission of the final 'e' in words like "offyc", etc.

<sup>20</sup> *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (1953).

Pollard further thought that the Good Quartos were very likely printed from the original 'prompt copy', which again was very probably in Shakespeare's own handwriting :

"... there is a considerable body of evidence... that when a play was printed by anyone except a pirate, it was the prompt-copy that was set up".<sup>21</sup>

Numerous copies of the MS of a play were discouraged, both on account of the cost and also with a view to minimising the chances of piratical publication. The author's autograph manuscript was often the only available 'copy', and was used both as prompt-copy and as 'copy' for the compositor. The Bad Quartos, on the contrary, were printed either from short-hand accounts of actual theatrical productions or from garbled 'parts' supplied by needy or disgruntled actors who had played in the original production of the play. Dover Wilson went further and developed the theory of the 'continuous copy'. He maintained that the same 'prompt-copy' was used whenever revisions of the play were called for, and Shakespeare probably made the necessary additions or changes on the margin or between the lines. This led inevitably to overlapping and overcrowding of lines, frequent interlineations, prose looking like verse and *vice versa*, two different passages developing the same theme (with the earlier version *not* scored out), additions occasionally pinned in or pasted, mere notes of the stage business mixed up with the regular play, and so on. Simpson's conclusions likewise showed how punctuation marks which were intended to indicate how Shakespeare meant his speeches to be delivered in the theatre or where the pauses were to be made were now indiscriminately carried over to the printed text, thereby posing ticklish problems for the editor and annotator. Thompson's discovery helped critics to formulate a new principle of textual criticism : that before an editor decides to emend a supposed corrupt text, he should ask himself whether the corruption is not really due to the compositor's misreading of Shakespeare's handwriting. The Good Quartos were henceforth to escape from the stigmata of "stolne and surreptitious" copies, and were to acquire supreme authority. Collation of texts and emendations were to be

<sup>21</sup> *Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates and the Problems of the Transmission of His Text* (1920), p. 63.

haphazard affairs no more, but a matter of critical and scientific bibliography. Writing about 30 years ago, Pollard remarked :

" With a knowledge of Shakespeare's handwriting and spelling added to the student's equipment new work can still be done, more than three centuries after the issue of the First Folio, and how interesting that work can be is seen in the *New Shakespeare* edited by Professor J. Dover Wilson. This is easily the most exciting ever printed, and one which has benefited not only by modern helps to emendation but perhaps even more, on the conservative side, by the completion of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which often unties knots without the surgery of conjecture ".<sup>22</sup>

How useful the *Oxford English Dictionary* can be to students of Shakespeare may be illustrated, not only by the ' Notes ' in modern editions of the Plays, but also by a reference to specialist studies like George Gordon's " Shakespeare's English ", originally given as a lecture at the Royal Institution and now included in his *Shakespearian Comedy* (1944).

Greene's death-bed fulmination against Shakespeare had for long given currency to the view that Shakespeare had begun his dramatic career as a reviser or lifter of other people's work. The 3 Parts of *Henry VI* were among the plays usually named as containing very little of Shakespeare's own work. In 1594 and 1595 had appeared respectively *The First Part of the Contention between the two famous houses of Yorke and Lancaster* and *The True tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke*, neither giving an indication of the author's name. Critics and editors had accordingly supposed that these were the originals, which after revision and improvement at the hands of Shakespeare became the 2nd and 3rd Parts of *Henry VI*, as they appear in the First Folio. In 1924, Peter Alexander published two papers in *The Times Literary Supplement*, which he later elaborated into the monograph, *Shakespeare's ' Henry VI ' and ' Richard III '* (1929). Alexander had been put on the right track by his teacher, the late J. S. Smart, but this in no wise diminishes the value of his own researches leading to the conclusion that *The Contention* and *The True Tragedie*, far from being Peele's or Marlowe's or Greene's work which Shakespeare had licked into better shape, were really the Bad Quartos of 2 and 3 *Henry VI*. Alexander sustained his argument with considerable force and subtlety, and concluded by

<sup>22</sup> *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, p. 284.

declaring that the 1594 and 1595 Quartos were only "pirated versions" of 2 and 3 Henry VI, put together by two of the leading players in Pembroke's Company. . . . what they chiefly relied on was the memory, sometimes the possession, of their own parts, and the recollection of the plays as a whole that remained with them from frequent rehearsals and performances".<sup>23</sup> Alexander similarly sought to prove, in the course of another article in *The Times Literary Supplement*, that the anonymous Quarto of *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594) was also a Bad Quarto and not, as had been supposed hitherto, the 'source' of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Scholars like E. K. Chambers, Kittredge, Baldwin, Hardin Craig and Parrott, however, do not share this view. "Nothing can make me believe", writes Parrott, "that actors reconstructing Shakespeare's play from memory — Alexander's notion — would have got all the names but one of the characters wrong, have shifted the scene from Italy to Athens, and completely altered the scheme of the sub-plot".<sup>24</sup> Likewise, with regard to *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (1591) also there is acute difference of opinion. Alexander is inclined to include it among the Bad Quartos, Tillyard feels that it may be a Bad Quarto of an early play by Shakespeare on the same theme,<sup>25</sup> while Parrott asserts that "it lacks all the 'stigmata' of a Bad Quarto".<sup>26</sup> We have thus in all nine Bad Quartos — *The Troublesome Raigne*, *The Contention*, *The True Tragedie*, *A Shrew*, *Henry V*, *Merry Wives*, *Pericles*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, the last two being available as Good Quartos also. Although the generally accepted view is that the Bad Quartos are based on versions patched up in the provinces from memory by needy actors who had played them earlier in town or on versions based on unauthorised short-

<sup>23</sup> Shakespeare's 'Henry VI' and 'Richard III', p. 116. Alexander writes in his *Shakespeare's Life and Art* that "the first to prove that *The Contention* and *The True Tragedie* are no more than Bad Quartos was Thomas Kenny in his *The Life and Genius of Shakespeare*, 1864". But this book is little known, and Alexander himself hadn't read it in 1929. Lately C. T. Prouty has unsuccessfully reopened the question in his 'Comparative Study' of *The Contention* and 2 Henry VI (1954).

<sup>24</sup> *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. IV, p. 367. Again, the suggestion that *A Shrew* was a perversion rather than the 'source' of *The Shrew* had been originally put forward by S. Hickson in *Notes and Queries* (1850).

<sup>25</sup> *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Peregrine Book), p. 217. Tillyard also recalls Courthope's views which support the Shakespearean authorship of *The Raigne*.

<sup>26</sup> *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. IV, p. 368.



hand reports of actual performances, Alfred Hart has advanced the interesting theory that "each Bad Quarto is a garbled abridgement of an acting version made officially by the play adapter of the company from Shakespeare's manuscript".<sup>27</sup> In other words, each Bad Quarto was at least twice removed from the original copy in Shakespeare's hand.

Greene's reference to the "upstart crow, beautified with our feathers" had long been supposed to apply to the playwright Shakespeare and not, as now seems clear, to the actor alone. Dover Wilson has, however, once again reopened the question in favour of the earlier view,<sup>28</sup> but he hardly carries conviction. Greene's main grouse is obviously this: the professional actor, Shakespeare, had been flourishing at the expense of the professional playwrights, it being far more lucrative to act in a play than to write it. To add insult to injury, Shakespeare had started playwriting also, instead of being content (as other actors were) with performing in plays written by the professional dramatists. Trying to have the best of both worlds, Shakespeare was driving men like Greene to feel their occupation gone. But ideas, however mistakenly held at first, often harden in course of time into definite mental habits or take roots in our consciousness as a flourishing myth. Even when the premisses are shown to be false, or at least not quite so self-evident as had been supposed, the old conclusions are mechanically repeated and are made to support cloud-capped edifices of learned argument and wild conjecture. Shakespeare had begun his career as a dramatist by 'vamping' Greene, Peele, Kyd, and Marlowe; revision and collaboration were often resorted to in Shakespeare's time; and Heminge and Condell had protested too much. The Folio of 1623 was thus too inflated a mass of dramatic writing to be accepted in its entirety as the authentic Shakespeare Canon. The methods of Sherlock Holmes had to be continually and cunningly pursued before the truth — the whole truth and nothing but the truth — about the Canon could emerge. And so the disintegrators of the Folio joined issue with the Idolaters, and a Homeric contest has followed.

The late J. M. Robertson was the most outstanding, as he was

<sup>27</sup> *Stolne and Surreptitious Copies: A Comparative Study of Shakespeare's Bad Quartos* (1942), p. 437.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. 'Malone and the Upstart Crow' (*Shakespeare Survey* 4, pp. 56-68).

also the most thoroughgoing, disintegrator of his time.<sup>29</sup> With his many-sided equipment, Robertson applied chronological, metrical and phraseological clues, contrasted what he thought were disparate styles in the plays, and bearing in mind the supposed archetypal pattern of Shakespeare's own characteristic style, he distributed different plays and different portions of plays among the various Elizabethan dramatists. The process is terribly complicated, but the main conclusions are clear enough. Marlowe's hand was in *Richard III*, *Richard II*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar* and also in *Titus* and in *The Comedy of Errors*; Peele was largely responsible for *Romeo and Juliet*; Chapman was the man behind the 3 "problem plays"; Kyd was obviously responsible for portions of *Hamlet*; and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was mainly the work of Greene. Shakespeare couldn't just have "imitated" these several dramatists, as certain critics have sometimes alleged; Shakespeare wasn't, after all, given to an overwhelming impulse to "apery", and his own style was so distinctive that it couldn't be easily missed.<sup>30</sup> Robertson's tireless researches landed him at last in the conclusion that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was Shakespeare's "first, and indeed only complete work". Robertson had the uncomfortable feeling that the academic critics — the arch Mandarins — weren't taking his views seriously enough. But the real criticism against Robertson is that his 'method' of progressive elimination of the un-Shakespearean portions of the First Folio would ultimately have reduced the authentic Shakespeare to a mere bundle of poetic passages — a very *reductio ad absurdum* of critical inquiry. Another industrious disintegrator was the late Albert Feuillerat, not an amateur like Robertson, but a full-blooded academic. His posthumous book, *The Composition of*

<sup>29</sup> Robertson's views are set forth in the 5 volumes of *The Shakespeare Canon* (1922-32), *The Genuine in Shakespeare, A Conspectus* (1930), and *Literary Detection* (1931). See for early criticism of Robertson's views the British Academy lectures by E. K. Chambers ('The Disintegration of Shakespeare', 1924) and Lascelles Abercrombie ('A Plea for the Liberty of Interpreting', 1930) included in *Aspects of Shakespeare* (Clarendon Press, 1933).

<sup>30</sup> In reply to an article by me in the *Federated India*, Robertson wrote on 30 May 1932: "You say I 'would not hear of any argument . . . that . . . Shakespeare may have consciously imitated' contemporary dramatists. More than once I have said that he adapted and echoed some — notably in the book on *Macbeth*". (The reference is to the book, *Literary Detection*.) The Robertson-Dover Wilson debate in the columns of the *Criterion* highlighted the controversy on 'Idolatry vs. Disintegration', and the rumblings were heard long afterwards.

*Shakespeare's Plays: Authorship — Chronology* (1953) covers only 6 plays, viz., 2 and 3 *Henry VI*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Titus* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Although Feuillerat sees the hand of 3 different authors besides Shakespeare's in these plays, he doesn't identify them but merely calls them A, B and C — C the earliest who wrote rhymed verse, A the next who wrote blank verse, and B an imitator of Marlowe.<sup>31</sup>

Sir Edmund Chambers and Dover Wilson have also done some disintegration ("hand to mouth" disintegration, Robertson described it), and Alexander rightly argues that it is these half-hearted disintegrators, the academic scholars, who have set the ball rolling down the inclined plane at the bottom of which extends the "Robertsonian morass". Chambers disintegrated about 10 of Shakespeare's plays, while Dover Wilson, the bibliographical analyst par excellence, has laid the axe on many more — for example, of the 14 comedies, only 4 are conceded by him to be Shakespeare's sole work. In the three *Henry VI* plays, Wilson finds Greene's main hand, and also work by Peele, Nashe and Shakespeare; but the plot and the basic text are substantially Greene's.<sup>32</sup> Chambers and Dover Wilson were no doubt aghast when they realised where Robertson's researches were leading him; but by underestimating the authority and integrity of Heminge and Condell, and of the Good Quartos, they had themselves invited the confusion and the chaos. "From mere inferiority", said Dr. Johnson, "nothing can be inferred; in the productions of wit there will be inequality. Sometimes judgement will err, and sometimes the matter itself will defeat the artist". The only safe course is to return to the main high road macadamised by Heminge and Condell, and accept the First Folio in its totality (and *Pericles*, and the Poems and the Sonnets) as Shakespeare's "owne writings".<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *The Composition of Shakespeare's Plays*, p. 331.

<sup>32</sup> G. Blackmore Evans traces the evolution of the final text in four stages, the Shakespearian revision being undertaken in early 1592 for the Company recently formed around Richard Burbage. (*Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. IV, pp. 86-7.)

<sup>33</sup> *Shakespeare's 'Henry VI' and 'Richard III'*, pp. 148-154. Alexander argues that if *Pericles* was not included in the First Folio, it was because it was only partly Shakespeare's work, which means that, according to Heminge and Condell, the 36 plays they published together in 1623 were wholly by Shakespeare.

## V

## SHAKESPEARE'S MARRIAGE

Like the detractors of Heminge and Condell and the disintegrators of the First Folio, the detractors of the 'man' Shakespeare too are ably answered by J. S. Smart, Peter Alexander, and their followers. Shakespeare's marriage, for example, has given rise to much speculation. The trouble is mainly on account of the double entry in the Bishop of Worcester's records — one, dated 27 November 1582, authorising the marriage of "Wm Shaxpere et Annam Whateley de Temple Grafton", and the other, dated the very next day, in respect of a bond executed by 2 friends of Anne Hathway's father freeing the Bishop from all liability in the event of any lawful impediment preventing the marriage of "Willm Shagspere on the one party and Anne Hathwey of Stratford". Besides, in six months' time (as shown in the Baptismal Register at Stratford), on 26 May 1583, Shakespeare's daughter, Susanna, was born. From the 2 entries in the Bishop's Episcopal Register, and the quick confinement of Shakespeare's wife, it has been inferred that although he really wanted to marry Anne Whateley of Temple Grafton, Anne Hathway's well-wishers, finding that she had been already seriously compromised by Shakespeare, compelled him to marry her and give up the other Anne. "A hasty wedding", says Parrott;<sup>34</sup> and Raleigh also finds "circumstances of irregularity and haste"<sup>35</sup> in the marriage. Joyce (or rather Stephen Dedalus) takes a backward glance at the unconventional courtship of Anne and William:

"He chose badly? He was chosen, it seems to me. If others have their will Ann bath a way. By cock, she was to blame. She put the comether on him, sweet and twenty-six. The greyeyed goddess who bends on the boy Adonis, stooping to conquer, as prologue to the swelling act, is a boldfaced Stratford wench . . ."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *William Shakespeare: A Handbook*, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 42. Cf. Ivor Brown: "It may sound like melodrama to suggest that when Anne Hathaway heard of a rival in Temple Grafton and of William's riding to Worcester, the registral centre of the area, she sent her friends in rapid pursuit, so that the entry for licence on one day was followed by the bond of the next. But melodrama plots are occasionally realised in life . . ." (*Shakespeare*,—Comet Paperback, 1957,—p. 41.)

<sup>36</sup> *Ulysses* (The Modern Library), p. 189. Darrel Figgis also supports the theory that Shakespeare, although he wanted to marry Anne Whateley,

The double-entry raises various questions : Were the 2 Annes — Whateley of Temple Grafton and Hathwey of Stratford (which included Shottery) — one and the same person ? Were there 2 different Shakespeares, Wm Shaxpere who married the Temple Grafton Anne and William Shagspere who married the Stratford Anne ? " Anne Whateley of Temple Grafton seems a long remove from Anne Hathwey of Stratford ", says Parrott ; but his solution — two William Shakespeares — seems to be one Shakespeare too many. It is argued, on the other hand, that the bond is more authoritative than the record of the issue of a license, that the correct name is Anne Hathwey, that Whateley was the scribe's mistake for " Hathwey " or " Hathaway ", and that the reference to Temple Grafton merely indicates that the marriage was to take place in the church at Temple Grafton, a village near Stratford. As regards the birth of Susanna six months after the marriage, Alexander argues that the fallacy usually perpetrated by Shakespeare's biographers is due to the " unhistorical conjecture that the church ceremony was then, as it would be now, the marriage ceremony ".<sup>37</sup> Fripp too admits that Shakespeare and Anne " co-habited, as young couples not unfrequently did, between betrothal, which legitimised children, and marriage, which entitled to dowry ".<sup>38</sup> Among Hindus also we have couples in present-day India who undergo both the Vedic ceremony and the formality of registration in a Government Office, the former to legitimise children and the latter to prevent bigamy. Again, when pre-puberty marriages were current in India till 1930, the marriage ceremony used to be followed some years later by another ceremony solemnising the nuptials, though not all young couples were prepared to wait before

All sanctimonious ceremonies may  
With full and holy rite be minist'red.  
(*Temp.*, IV. i. 16)

Thus it is not necessary to think in terms of William ' seducing ' Anne or Anne seducing William before the church ceremony. Besides, M. M. Reese points to the possibility of John Shakespeare

was compelled to marry the other Anne. (*Shakespeare, A Study*, 1911, pp. 33-4.)

<sup>37</sup> Introduction to Shakespeare's *Complete Works*, p. xii ; also *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, pp. 23-4, and *A Shakespeare Primer*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>38</sup> *Shakespeare, Man and Artist* (1938), Vol. I, pp. 186-7.

(William's father) and Richard Hathaway (Anne's father) being good friends of long standing, and perhaps Anne's marriage to William was in contemplation when Richard drew up his will and it was his unexpected death in the summer of 1582 that "provided the main reason for the postponement of the public celebration of the wedding".<sup>30</sup> We may thus try to explain away the mystery of the double-entry without resorting to melodrama, but full conviction cannot be carried to all, and the matter must rest here till fresh authoritative evidence should be forthcoming.

But of course Shakespeare, as he grew older and lived longer in London, might have now and then regretted his marriage. She was 8 years older in age, she was uneducated, and they had been a little too impatient in love. Orsino in *Twelfth Night* tells Viola that a woman should take one older than herself; Claudio in *Measure for Measure* nearly loses his life for anticipating the marriage ceremony in his relations with Juliet; Prospero in *The Tempest* warns Ferdinand against breaking Miranda's virgin-knot before their marriage. Aren't these clear pointers to Shakespeare's way of thinking? He had no doubt made the best of a bad slip, but in retrospect it might have seemed to him a blunder all the same. Or, again, he might have thought differently. Must we pronounce the marriage a failure because Shakespeare, one of the great romantic poets of all time, had married an uneducated woman eight years older than himself? Rabindranath Tagore, another of the darlings of Romance, married at the age of 22 a girl of 10, who was plain and almost illiterate; yet their marriage endured, and they lived happily together. Shakespeare's marriage too endured, and proved fruitful. It wasn't the perfect marriage of true minds, but very few marriages, after all, achieve such splendid consummation.

It is all too readily assumed that, after the birth of the twins in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford, and apart from occasional visits returned for good only when he retired from the theatre in or about 1613. Are we to suppose that Shakespeare never took his family to London? Where all is surmise, one hypothesis seems to be as good as another. The purchase of New Place in Stratford in 1597 roughly coincided with Shakespeare leaving his spacious house in Bishopsgate in London. From this Reese speculates as follows:

<sup>30</sup> *Shakespeare: His World and His Work* (1953), p. 29.

"All that we know of his life and character makes it possible that as soon as he had established himself in the London theatre, he sent for his wife and children to share his life with him. But when Hamnet fell ill, and was taken to Stratford to die, he decided not to expose Susanna and Judith to the same dangers; accordingly he abandoned his house in Bishopsgate, settled his family in New Place, and went off to live in lodgings on Bankside. We may assume too that thereafter his visits to Stratford were longer and more frequent".<sup>40</sup>

But Ivor Brown affirms: "There is no evidence that Anne ever followed him to London or brought the children with her".<sup>41</sup> Talking of fool-proof evidence, we can only echo Osric's words: "Nothing, neither way".

The provision in Shakespeare's will that his "second-best bed with the furniture" should go to his widow has also led to much unseemly speculation. Was it in the nature of a crowning insult? Was it because Shakespeare wished to leave his property in tact to be inherited by Susanna's son (should one such be born)? Was it to protect Anne "from the frailties of her sex"?<sup>42</sup> A will is but a business-like document, and to read it as though it is one of Hamlet's soliloquies is not proper. The marriage had endured for a period of 33 years and in his last years Shakespeare was able to enjoy the fruits of retirement in the bosom of his family; and the last will and testament only "shows the understanding and harmony that must have prevailed in the house".<sup>43</sup> Anne survived her husband for 7 years, and died in her 67th year and was buried on 8 August 1623.

## VI

### 'SMALL LATIN AND LESS GREEK'

In his commendatory verses prefixed to the First Folio, Ben Jonson apostrophised "My Beloued, the Author Mr. William Shakespeare: and what he hath left us" as follows:

And though thou hadst small *Latine*, and less *Greeke*,  
From thence to honour thee, I would not seeke

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>41</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 49.

<sup>42</sup> Reese, *Shakespeare*, p. 368.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander, *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 224.

For names; but call forth thund'ring *Aeschilus*,  
*Euripides*, and *Sophocles* to us,  
*Paccuius*, *Accius*, him of Cordoua dead,  
 To life againe, to hear thy Buskin tread,  
 And shake a Stage . . .

This was understood, at its face value, to imply that Shakespeare had hardly any classical education worth mention. Besides, there is the tradition recorded by Rowe :

"He (Shakespeare) had fallen into ill company: and amongst them, some that made a frequent practice of Deer stealing, engag'd him with them more than once in robbing a Park that belong'd to Sir Thomas Lucy of Cherlecoi, near Stratford".

Further, Shakespeare had added to the injury of the theft the insult of a scurrilous ballad about Lucy. The result was the original fine had to be doubled, and Shakespeare forced to leave "his business and family in Warwickshire, for some time, and shelter himself in London". Raleigh, after recounting these details from Rowe's *Life* (1709), adds: "All this is perfectly credible; the evidence that remains to us is unanimous in its favour; the allusions in the plays bear it out; and there is no solid argument against it".<sup>44</sup> This in the face of Malone, who pointed out that, as there was no deer park at all at Charlecote (or even in its neighbourhood) in Shakespeare's time, he couldn't possibly have infuriated Sir Thomas by stealing his deer. More recently, the evidence against the whole story has been ably marshalled by Smart in his *Shakespeare: Truth and Tradition* (1928) and Alexander in his *Shakespeare's 'Henry VI' and 'Richard III'*. What made Shakespeare leave Stratford round about 1585 was neither Lucy's action against him nor any other mysterious turn of events but merely the birth of the twins, Hamnet and Judith, and the need every young man with a wife and three children feels to seek a livelihood outside the narrow confines of his birth-place.

Since the tradition of Shakespeare falling into "ill company" is without real foundation, it is not unreasonable to believe that he had normal education in the Stratford Grammar School, perhaps from the age of 7 to 14. Modern scholars like George A. Plimpton and T. W. Baldwin have made it clear that the grammar

<sup>44</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 43.



school literary education at Stratford must have been far higher than it had once been thought possible. Lyly's *Grammatica Latina* was the common text-book in Elizabethan grammar schools, and it was not unlikely that Shakespeare had to read the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, Mantuan's *Eclogues*, Livy's *History* (Book I), and the *Aeneid* of Virgil. Plimpton writes :

"The pedagogical books, the course of study, the textbooks, the instruction by three university graduates, give one a splendid idea of what the Stratford Grammar School was like when Shakespeare entered it. The basis of instruction was Latin . . . the child went a long way in the Latin language and literature, so that a boy's knowledge of the classics was better than that of the average college graduate in America now".<sup>45</sup>

As a boy Shakespeare would have come in contact with Walter Roche, Simon Hunt and Thomas Jenkins — able schoolmasters all of them, and all of them Oxford men and Fellows of their respective colleges. The boy must have accordingly learned, not only to read Latin with facility, but also to compose Latin epistles, for the vigorous Elizabethan system of school training produced "more competent Latinists than most universities today".<sup>46</sup> Dr. Johnson himself was of the view that "it is most likely that he (Shakespeare) learned Latin sufficiently to make him acquainted with construction, but that he never advanced to an easy perusal of the Roman authors". As for Ben Jonson's remark, it can be explained away as an egotistical effusion, rather stressing his own superiority to Shakespeare than the latter's absolute mediocrity in classical scholarship. As Fripp points out, Ben Jonson was "envious of Shakespeare, and not a little proud of his own superiority. But scholarship does not lie in quantity. With his amazing grip of the *Metamorphoses*, Shakespeare gained an insight into language, with another speech and, therefore, into his own, into the significance of words and their capacity of expression, entirely beyond the power of his contemporary".<sup>47</sup> On the other

<sup>45</sup> *The Education of Shakespeare* (1933), p. 139. T. M. Baldwin's *William Shakespeare's Petty School* (1943) and *William Shakespeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke* (1944) contain an exhaustive discussion of the subject.

<sup>46</sup> Nicoll, *Shakespeare*, p. 68.

<sup>47</sup> *Shakespeare, Man and Artist*, Vol. I, p. 114. See also *Shakespeare's Ovid*; Arthur Golding's translation of the *Metamorphoses*, edited by W. H. D. Rouse (Centaur Press).

hand, Ben Jonson might have referred to the 'small Latin and less Greek' only to bring out all the more effectively Shakespeare's own eminence as a writer of tragedy and comedy, for he certainly equalled if not excelled the giants of ancient Greece and Rome.

Another clue to Shakespeare's classical learning is provided by the entry in the antiquarian Aubrey's memoranda :

"Though, as Ben Jonson says of him, that he had but little Latin and Greek, he understood Latin pretty well, for he had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country".

Aubrey noted against this entry : "from Mr. Beeston", a person who, according to Alexander, was "most likely to be accurately informed concerning the fact related, for he was an actor and manager and son of Christopher Beeston, who had been one of Shakespeare's associates from 1594 to 1602". Stratford gossip 65 years after Shakespeare's death was apt to be imaginative, and there was talk of young William following for a while his father's trade (that of a butcher) and killing a calf "in high style" to the accompaniment of a speech ! It was all wrong, of course, for John Shakespeare was a glover, not a butcher ; and, driven to choose between latter-day Stratford gossip and the authoritative testimony of Beeston, Alexander rightly concludes that "if we knew anything about Shakespeare's employment between his leaving school and entering the theatre, it is that he was a schoolmaster in the country".<sup>48</sup> Both Reese and Marchette Chute make the qualification that Shakespeare, since he had neither a university degree nor holy orders nor yet a licence from the Worcester diocese, he could only have been an 'abecedarius' or non-graduate assistant to a regular schoolmaster.<sup>49</sup> Among the employments found for Shakespeare by his enterprising biographers are these : a butcher's assistant, a lawyer's clerk, an apothecary, a soldier, a printer, an usher in the family of Sir Henry Goodere, a wanderer in the country as a supertramp, a domestic teacher in a Catholic family, a sailor, a schoolmaster — and the last is at least a little more plausible than the others.

As a country schoolmaster, then, Shakespeare had assiduously wooed the Muses — as many young schoolmasters still do. *The*

<sup>48</sup> Shakespeare's 'Henry VI' and 'Richard III', pp. 129-30.

<sup>49</sup> Reese, *Shakespeare*, p. 26 ; Chute, *Shakespeare of London* (1951), p. 305.

*Comedy of Errors*, an adaptation of 2 Latin comedies (the *Menaechmi* and the *Amphitruo* of Plautus), *Titus Andronicus*, a horror-tragedy obviously Senecan in inspiration, and *Venus and Adonis*, a poem full of Ovidian echoes, were perhaps Shakespeare's first efforts, and their learning is not beyond that of an Elizabethan schoolmaster. This means that we needs must push the beginnings of Shakespeare's career as a dramatist and poet to 1586-7, or not much later.<sup>50</sup> By 1587 or 1588, Shakespeare took the right measure of his powers and inclinations, "threw down the schoolmaster's rod, closed his books, and took the road to London".<sup>51</sup>

The pragmatic simplicity of this hypothesis is its best recommendation, and it is likely this will command increasing acceptance among Shakespearian scholars. Farmer, whose *Essay* was written 200 years ago, couldn't believe that the ill-educated Shakespeare wrote the 'early' plays, so full as they are of classical echoes and allusions. But if we accept Beeston's testimony as well as the authority of the Folio, our main perplexities vanish resolving the paradox of near-illiteracy creating supreme works of literary art, of violence and recklessness blossoming into sweetness and gentleness; and it also accounts for the "lost" years of Shakespeare's nonage:

"The classical quotations, allusions, and borrowings, in the early plays, so far from proving that Heminge and Condell were printing work which was not by Shakespeare, increase our confidence in the integrity of their text. The one authentic tradition of the early years and the textual tradition agree that what Farmer declared was certainly not Shakespeare's could indeed be his; Beeston said Shakespeare was a schoolmaster, Heminge and Condell published as his what has all the marks of this schooling. Both traditions come from Shakespeare's own Company and they confirm each other".<sup>52</sup>

And Sisson says, more succinctly: "The Stratford Man, and the London Dramatist and Poet, are plainly one and the same, sharing the one person and the one life".

But traditional habits of thinking are difficult to give up, and J. A. K. Thomson, after surveying all the available evidence, feels

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Sisson: "Scholars are now beginning to date his first plays as early as in 1588". (*Shakespeare Survey* 3, p. 2.)

<sup>51</sup> Parrott, *William Shakespeare*, p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Alexander, *Shakespeare's 'Henry VI' and 'Richard III'*, p. 141.

compelled once more to dismiss Beeston's testimony, and adds further, evidently with critics like Alexander in mind: "But I find to my dismay that some of our best Shakespearian scholars prefer it to the first-hand evidence" (of Ben Jonson).<sup>53</sup> *Venus and Adonis* is doubtless Ovidian, but after all Shakespeare might have merely used Golding's translation; *The Comedy of Errors* is Plautine, without a doubt, but only in its plot, not its diction; and as for *Titus*, its numerous classical echoes do imply "a considerably wider range of classical learning than is discoverable in the plays which are certainly Shakespeare's own" — the insinuation being that *Titus* was probably not Shakespeare's work at all. Thomson's reasoning is often naive: if there is a Latin motto, well, the publisher might have inserted it; if there is a clear echo, it was one of those Latin tags which was on everybody's lips; and, in short, Shakespeare "had little in the way of classical knowledge that could not have been picked up in the course of his reading of English authors, were it only Lyly and Spenser".<sup>54</sup> As against this view, we can balance F. P. Wilson's:

"We shall say that he had 'small Latin and no Greek'; but that his Latin, small indeed in comparison with Jonson's, was yet sufficient to make him not wholly dependent upon translation".<sup>55</sup>

But even Thomson half-heartedly concedes that Shakespeare was by no means illiterate; that, on the contrary, "he had read a good deal, though rapidly and (if I may say so without profanity) not infrequently with an eye to what he could use". Thomson's thesis is that, having made unsuccessful starts with classical themes and come under the fire of criticism from Greene, Nashe and others, Shakespeare gave up classical models for a time, but later began again under Plutarch's influence when he wrote *Julius Caesar*. While not altogether discounting the influence of Ovid and the Ovidian stories on Shakespeare,<sup>56</sup> Thomson nevertheless puts the main emphasis on Plutarch:

"I believe that it was from Plutarch that Shakespeare learned how to make a tragedy of the kind exemplified in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, Mac-

<sup>53</sup> *Shakespeare and the Classics* (1952), p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>55</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 3 ("Shakespeare's Reading"), p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. J. Dover Wilson: "... the paramount influence of Golding is incontestable. Nor was it confined to Shakespeare's mythological references..." (*Shakespeare Survey* 10, p. 24).

*beth* and *Lear*. It was, I think, in the course of writing *Julius Caesar* that he learned it".<sup>87</sup>

Going beyond Latin to Greek, beyond Plautus, Seneca and Ovid to Plutarch, Shakespeare the poet of *Venus and Adonis* and the author of *Titus* and *The Comedy of Errors* became the poet of *Macbeth*, reincarnating Greek tragedy in a new form suited to the genius of the English language. Another classical scholar, H. D. F. Kitto, has also come to the conclusion that although Shakespeare knew no Greek, he had somehow assimilated the Greek spirit in his great histories and tragedies. Both the *Persians* of Aeschylus and the Yorkist tetralogy of Shakespeare "are good illustrations of Aristotle's dictum that Poetry is more serious and philosophical than History". The Greek tragedians and the Man of Stratford have a kinship that transcends the obvious differences and the great distance in space and time :

"They speak the same language, though in different dialects : those in Greek, this one in English. They speak about the same things ; whether they tell us of an Agamemnon or a Creon, or of a King Richard or a Hamlet, they are speaking in the same grave and spacious way of nothing less than the terms on which the gods will let us live ; and though each of them speaks in his own voice and with his own accent, about this one thing they do not speak differently".<sup>88</sup>

And so we come back to Ben Jonson's magnanimous tribute that Shakespeare was quite on a par with Aeschylus, Sophocles, and the rest of the great ancients. Even the 'small Latin and less Greek' preamble was apparently meant only to highlight the glory of Shakespeare's achievement as a dramatist in the classical modes.

<sup>87</sup> *Shakespeare and the Classics*, p. 242.

<sup>88</sup> 'A Classical Scholar Looks at Shakespeare' in *More Talking of Shakespeare* edited by John Garrett (1939), p. 54.

## CHAPTER II

### THE 'TEXT' OF SHAKESPEARE

#### I

#### THE QUARTOS AND THE FOLIOS

Students of Shakespeare owe a great deal to the many critics and scholars of our generation and of previous generations who have waged unrelenting war against the darkness and the fog and helped the steady spread of truth about the Man and his plays and his poems. Yet even though knowledge confidently advances, wisdom still discreetly halts. Critical subtlety is sometimes allied to perversity, and traditionalism is often but a cloak for obstinacy. There are occasions when men see and still refuse to recognise what they plainly see, and hence they canter blindfolded across the obvious to land on the bleak frustrating rocks that are ranged tier on tier on the other side. It is in the context of this jungle of scholarship and criticism—a background rich, variegated, exciting, and exasperating in the extreme—that the work of modern scholars like Dover Wilson, Peter Alexander, Hardin Craig, C. J. Sisson, and the new 'Arden' editors should be judged. They are hard-headed scholars, eager researchers, and sensitive critics; there are no frozen credits in them, their hearts and minds chime together, and they are givers of light and true guides to the meaning and the mystery. 'Editing' Shakespeare is an expert affair<sup>1</sup>, calling for the auspicious conjunction of many qualities, and it has a respectable lineage going back to Heminge and Condell at least. It would be interesting to recall the great names, and it would be instructive to recapitulate briefly some of the problems involved in the 'editing' of Shakespeare's plays.

<sup>1</sup> Vide J. Dover Wilson's 'The New Way with Shakespeare's Texts: An Introduction for Lay Readers' (*Shakespeare Survey* 7, 8, 9 & 11).

The 'Quarto' editions (Good and Bad) of Shakespeare's plays appeared as follows :

1. *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (B), 1591
2. *Titus Andronicus* (G), 1594 ; also 1600, 1611
3. *The Contention* (Bad Quarto of 2 *Henry VI*), 1594
4. *The True Tragedie* (Bad Quarto of 3 *Henry VI*), 1595  
*The Whole Contention* (comprising the above 2 Bad Quartos), 1619
5. *The Taming of a Shrew* (B), 1594
6. *Love's Labour's Lost* (G), 1598
7. *Romeo and Juliet* (B), 1597 ; also (G), 1599, 1609
8. *Richard II* (G), 1597 ; also 1598, 1608, 1615
9. *Richard III* (G ?), 1597 ; also 1598, 1602, 1605, 1612, 1622
10. *I Henry IV* (G), 1598 ; also 1599, 1604, 1608, 1613, 1622
11. *2 Henry IV* (G), 1600
12. *Henry V* (B), 1600 ; also 1602, 1619
13. *The Merchant of Venice* (G), 1600 ; also 1619
14. *Much Ado About Nothing* (G), 1600
15. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (G), 1600 ; also 1619
16. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (B), 1602 ; also 1619
17. *Hamlet* (B), 1603 ; also (G), 1604, 1605, 1611 (?)
18. *Troilus and Cressida* (G), 1609
19. *King Lear* (G), 1608 ; also 1619
20. *Pericles* (B ?), 1609 (2 issues) ; also 1611, 1619
21. *Othello* (G), 1622

The Quarto editions dated 1619 in the above table (*The Whole Contention*, *Henry V*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Merry Wives*, *King Lear* and *Othello*) were published by Thomas Pavier, along with two other plays, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *Sir John Oldcastle*, which also he attributed to Shakespeare. Probably he wished to issue these 10 plays as a collected edition of Shakespeare's Works, but he came up against difficulties and so he decided to issue them separately, and he even gave false dates to *Henry V* (1608), *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Dream* (1600), and *King Lear* (1608).

Then came Heminge and Condell's Folio of 1623. With Heminge and Condell must have been associated a 'literary edi-

tor' (as we should call him today), somebody (or a group of persons) who got the 'copies' ready for the press. Was it Ben Jonson who undertook the job? Was it Hugh Holland, a Fellow of Trinity, whose memorial sonnet appeared in the Folio?<sup>2</sup> Anyhow, the Folio was issued as a joint venture by Isaac Jaggard (son of William Jaggard who had printed Pavier's Quartos), Edward Blount, John Smithwick and William Aspley. Besides the 19 Quartos issued one way or another in Shakespeare's own life-time, and *Othello* issued in 1622, the Folio published for the first time 16 plays, viz., *The Tempest*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *As You Like It*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Winter's Tale*, *1 Henry VI*, *Henry VIII*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline*, which were entered in the Register of the Stationers' Company of London on 8 November 1623. These 16 plays were set up from reasonably authoritative manuscript copies of the plays, or transcripts of the same, made available by Heminge and Condell on behalf of the King's company of players to which Shakespeare had originally belonged. *King John* too was set up likewise, thus superseding the Bad Quarto of 1591. With regard to *Merry Wives*, *The Shrew*, *Henry V* and 2 & 3 *Henry VI*, the Bad Quartos were replaced by more authentic manuscripts. Again, *Hamlet* and *Othello*, though available in Good Quartos, were set up from manuscripts: the former from a transcript of the prompt-book, the latter from either the author's own 'foul' papers or rough copy of the play, or a transcript of the same. *Much Ado*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, 1 & 2 *Henry IV*, *Richard III*, *Troilus*, *Titus* and *King Lear* were set up from the Good Quartos or one of their reprints. (The Good Quartos of the last six plays, that is the plays from *Richard II* to *King Lear* but not 1 *Henry IV*, were corrected or supplemented with reference to the prompt-book, or the playhouse manuscript, or the author's foul papers.)

Of the 36 plays included in the First Folio, 19 were divided into acts and scenes, 11 into acts alone, and the remaining 6 (2 & 3 *Henry VI*, *Troilus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Timon* and *Antony and Cleopatra*) had no act-and-scene division whatsoever. The First Folio (F<sub>1</sub>) was printed on excellent paper, and ran to 908

\* W. W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, p. 154.



pages; originally priced at £ 1, a copy today would probably cost over £ 20,000. Out of a total of about 1,200 copies of the Folio originally printed, some 250 seem to be now extant, of which 80 are in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington. In his 2-volume work of painstaking scholarship, *The Printing and Proof-Reading of the First Folio of Shakespeare* (1963), Charlton Hinman has gone much further than E. E. Willoughby (*The Printing of the First Folio of Shakespeare*, 1932) and even Alice Walker (*Textual Problems of the First Folio*, 1953) and shown how at least 5 compositors of unequal competence were responsible for the setting up of  $F_1$ , and how the order in which the formes of the folios were printed often determined whether insufficient matter should be spread out somehow (through the breaking-up of lines, for example) to fill the pages, or an excess of matter should be compressed through the omission of stage-directions or of a portion of the text itself. By collating the copies in the Folger Library by a photographic process, Hinman has been able to list the variants from copy to copy, since Jaggard seems to have begun the printing even when the proofing was still in progress, the copies printed later being thus more free from errors. From Hinman's monumental labours it is clear that the 'text' of some of the plays — perhaps more than half in the Canon, including *Othello* and *King Lear* — has suffered in this and other ways, thereby adding to the difficulties of the modern editor of Shakespeare. We also get an idea of the conditions under which the subsequent Folios too might have been set up and proofed in the 17th century printing houses.

Following the success of the First Folio, the Second Folio ( $F_2$ ) appeared in 1632, and the third ( $F_3$ ) in 1663. Next year, a re-issue of  $F_3$  included *Pericles*, *The London Prodigal*, *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *The Puritan*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *Lochrine*,<sup>3</sup> all except the first almost certainly wholly spurious. The fourth and last Folio ( $F_4$ ) came out in 1685, practically a reprint of the 1664 issue of  $F_3$ . The later Folios, apart from attempts at the modernisation of the spelling and punctuation, corrections or alterations in the stage directions and in the forms

<sup>3</sup> These 6 plays, along with 8 other apocryphal plays (*Arden of Feversham*, *Edward III*, *Mucedorus*, *The Merry Devil of Edmington*, *Fair Em*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, *The Birth of Merlin*, and *Sir Thomas More*), are published in *The Shakespeare Apocrypha*, edited by C. F. Tucker Brooke (1918).

of Greek and Latin proper names, and occasional metrical adjustments, suffered inevitably from the stern bibliographical law of "the progressive deterioration of successive reprints", and took the 'text' further and further away from Shakespeare. On the other hand, in numerous instances,  $F_2$  (in which the hand of 3 or 4 'improvers' has been detected) and its successors had better readings than  $F_1$ . Indeed, it is said that out of 1679 changes in  $F_2$ , 213 were restorations of readings of earlier editions, while 623 have since found general acceptance.<sup>4</sup>

## II

## FROM ROWE TO FURNESS

If in the 16th and 17th centuries the fate of the text was determined largely (if not exclusively) by the compositors,<sup>5</sup> in the 18th century the editor assumed an increasingly important role in deciding what the text should be. The demand for Shakespeare's plays was steadily increasing, and Jacob Tonson the enterprising publisher decided to capitalise the demand. Nicholas Rowe, a dramatist himself, undertook the task of editing the plays anew, and his edition in 6 octavo volumes came out in 1709. His basic text was the 1685 Folio ( $F_4$ ), but he restored over 100 lines from the Quartos, retained all the spurious plays, divided the plays into acts and scenes throughout in conformity with contemporary practice, and supplied the 'dramatis personae' to each play. When this first 'modern' edition was reprinted in 1714, it carried also Rowe's pioneering effort, *Some Account of the Life of Mr. William Shakespeare*. "If we may judge from the very useful list of readings accepted by modern editors", says A. W. Pollard, "quantitatively Rowe had no rival except the team of improvers of 1632, with Thcobald as a not too bad third".<sup>6</sup>

Tonson now secured the services of Alexander Pope for another 'prestige' edition of Shakespeare. Pope's version of the *Iliad*

<sup>4</sup> fn. on p. 155, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, by W. W. Greg.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. B. Harrison: "The handwriting of an author is only one of the many causes of error in the printed text, for at times printers will make the oddest mistakes even when following printed copy. There is indeed no accounting for a large proportion of human errors" (*Introducing Shakespeare*, p. 168).

<sup>6</sup> *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, pp. 281-2.

in heroic verse had appeared in 1715-20, and stabilised his commanding position in the literary world. His edition of Shakespeare's Works came out in 1723-5, and carried a useful Preface. He had perhaps taken his editorial labours too casually, and certainly the text was cavalierly treated by him. He omitted the spurious plays, and even *Pericles*; he paid some attention to metre and punctuation, indicated the presence of beautiful lines by commas on the margin, and starred scenes (though this was but seldom) which he deemed beautiful in their entirety. He pruned Shakespeare without compunction, the worst surgery being the removal of the famous line — "The multitudinous seas incarnadine" — from the text of *Macbeth*. Nevertheless Pope's literary tastes, judged by contemporary neo-classic standards, were by no means eccentric. No doubt he preferred the descriptive and the sententious to the dramatic and poetic, jewelled clarity to glorious incandescence; and of the four great tragedies, only *Macbeth* seems to have elicited great praise from him. But what is really remarkable is that Pope should have at all taken so much interest, and should have seen so much to praise, in a kind of writing so different from his own, and seemingly alien to the whole spirit of his age.<sup>1</sup>

Pope's edition, with its many sins of commission and omission, provoked Lewis Theobald's *Shakespeare Restored* (1726), which, while criticising Pope's treatment of the text, also suggested emendations for obscure or corrupt readings in *Hamlet* and most of the other plays. These were embodied later in his own edition in 7 volumes (1733), a second edition following in 1740. Although Pope pilloried Theobald in the *Dunciad* of 1728 to avenge the exposures in *Shakespeare Restored*, it is to this scholar's particular credit that he was the first editor to treat Shakespeare as a classic, and bring alike patience and industry, scholarship and ingenuity, into the emendation or elucidation of obscure passages in the plays.

The next editions were those of Hanmer, 1743-4; Warburton, 1747; Johnson, 1765; Capell, 1768; Steevens, 1773 (also 1778, 1785, 1793); and Malone, 1790. Johnson's edition is a landmark in the history of Shakespeare criticism, not so much on account of the 'text' (for he did little to improve it), but because

<sup>1</sup> Cf. John Butt's *Pope's Taste in Shakespeare* (1936).

of the 60-page Preface ("the most manly piece of criticism that was ever published in any country", according to Adam Smith) and the innumerable critical comments and elucidatory notes many of which retain their vigour and freshness to this day. As Nichol Smith has remarked, "Not only was Johnson's the best edition which had yet appeared; it is still one of the few editions which are indispensable".<sup>2</sup>

Capell, on the other hand, conscientiously collated all texts available to him, and when he died left this priceless collection to the Trinity College, Cambridge, for the perennial benefit of succeeding generations of scholars. Steevens, a less useful textual critic, has however supplied many shrewd comments and annotations, and his last (1793) edition was the first to indicate typographically that speeches by two or more different speakers really constitute a single line of verse, a practice now universally followed in editions of Shakespeare. Here is a typical example from the opening scene of *Hamlet*:

<i>Francisco.</i>	Give you good night.	
<i>Marcellus.</i>	O, farewell, honest soldier!	
	Who hath reliev'd you?	
<i>Francisco.</i>	Bernardo hath my place.	
	Give you good night.	(Exit.
<i>Marcellus.</i>	Holla, Bernardo!	
<i>Bernardo.</i>	Say —	
	What, is Horatio here?	
<i>Horatio.</i>	A piece of him.	

"Give you good night". / "Holla, Bernardo!" / "Say —", which are assigned to Francisco, Marcellus and Bernardo respectively together make one complete iambic line. There are numerous such examples in the later plays.

Malone's edition (1790) was in many ways the most important event since the publication of the First Folio. He brought back *Pericles* into the canon, and included the Poems and Sonnets as well. *Pericles* had been excluded from the First Folio by Heminge and Condell, probably because they had felt it was but partly by Shakespeare. But Philip Edwards has argued that Gosson's Bad Quarto of 1609 (the basis of the subsequent editions) was a reconstruction by 2 'reporters' who worked by different methods.

<sup>2</sup> *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare* (1903), p. xxxi.

Might it not be that "the *immediate* cause of the sudden and startling improvement in the style at III. i. is the different capability and habits of the second reporter"?<sup>9</sup> This, again, might favour the supposition that the play as a whole was really Shakespeare's, though now available only in a tantalisingly corrupt version. As for the Poems, *Venus and Adonis* had first appeared in 1593, *The Rape of Lucrece* in 1594, the *Sonnets* in 1609, and the *Poems* in one volume in 1640. Now at last, in 1790, the 37 plays and all the poems and sonnets were published together for the first time, and the "Works" of Shakespeare more or less assumed a definite, if not a definitive, shape. To Malone, Elizabethan life and literature was familiar ground, and hence his edition can lay claim to special importance. He didn't accept the order in which the plays were traditionally printed as the chronological order of composition, and so he opened a new field of inquiry that has since yielded very valuable results.

The 17th century was the Age of the Folios : the 18th century was the Age of the Great Editions : and the 19th century was to be the Age of the Variorum Editions. The 19th century also saw tireless investigations into the chronology of the plays, and witnessed too some of the most inspired imaginative interpretations of the characters in the plays. The first Variorum editions appeared in 1803 and 1813, both based on Steevens' edition ; in 1821 appeared the third Variorum, based on Malone's edition. Knight's appeared from 1838 onwards, J. P. Collier's in 1841-4, A. Dyce's in 1857, 1866 and 1874. The Cambridge Shakespeare, a landmark in its own way, appeared between 1863 and 1867, and its 'text' still enjoys after almost a century a phenomenal vogue in the 'Globe' edition. The Variorums culminated at last in Furness's New Variorum (1871 onwards), which is the last word in massiveness, editorial comprehension, and conscientious scholarship. The 19th century editions, so many of them, have all promoted the good cause in their several ways and helped the advance towards the 'ideal' text of Shakespeare, though of course we know also that this ideal is but a mirage that must for ever lure us on only to elude us in the end.

<sup>9</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 5, p. 45.

## III

## 'EDITING' SHAKESPEARE

The Quartos and Folios were content to give a 'text' of the plays; the 18th century editors, besides giving what in their opinion was a satisfactory text, ventured also into the collateral realms of biography (Rowe), chronology (Malone), emendation (Theobald), and criticism (Johnson); the 19th century 'variorum' editors, while giving as 'text' the one that seemed to them the least unsatisfactory or merely giving the  $F_1$  text, printed also all or at least the more important variant readings, thus making it possible for the intelligent reader to think and judge for himself. 'Editing' Shakespeare was becoming a more and more complicated business, calling for varied powers and a sense of dedication. Furness carried the 'variorum' tradition as far as it could go, and made his edition almost a universal congress of all the editors and critics that had preceded him by printing excerpts from their notes, elucidations and critical comments. The vogue for Furness may be seen from the fact that his Variorum editions of the four great tragedies and of *Romeo and Juliet* are now appearing, newly revised, in paperbacks on both sides of the Atlantic.

Although the 20th century editions of Shakespeare defy exhaustive enumeration, the old *Arden* edited by W. J. Craig and R. H. Case, the *New Shakespeare* edited by Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson, G. L. Kittredge's edition of individual plays, the *New Arden*, first under the editorship of Una Ellis-Fermor, and now of H. F. Brooks and Harold Jenkins, and the recent one-volume editions by Hardin Craig, Peter Alexander and C. J. Sisson deserve special mention. Editions prepared during the last 3 or 4 decades have fully taken note of the revolution in Shakespearean scholarship brought about by the researches of modern bibliographers like A. W. Pollard, R. B. McKerrow and W. W. Greg. McKerrow's *Prolegomena to the Oxford Shakespeare* (1939) and Greg's *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare* (1942) have in their different, but largely complementary, ways richly illuminated the difficult paths of editorial labour for future scholars, and it is not permissible any longer to tolerate slipshod editions of Shakespeare's plays. McKerrow died before he could see his projected

Oxford Shakespeare in old spelling through the press, but many of his suggestions would be applicable even to editions in modernised spelling and punctuation. The *New Clarendon* series under the general editorship of R. E. C. Houghton has many pleasant features, and takes due note of the gains of modern scholarship, but it is an edition for the junior student rather than for the scholar.

An absolutely perfect edition of Shakespeare is indeed a mirage, and therefore near-perfection is all that editors can aim at. "There can be no edition of the work of a writer of former times", writes McKerrow, "which is satisfactory to all readers".<sup>10</sup> Greg adds that "in the case of Shakespeare . . . we cannot hope to achieve a certainly correct text, not so much on account of the uncertainties of transmission—though they are sometimes serious—as because the author may never have produced a definitive text for us to recover".<sup>11</sup> Is it, then, little better than the proverbial blind man trying to discover in a dark room a non-existent black cat? Nevertheless, we may suppose that the best modern editions come reasonably close to Shakespeare, and hence further advances towards the 'ideal' can be no more than minor recoveries of lost territory, and not spectacular marches.

In 'editing' Shakespeare, the choice of the basic text comes first. As Pollard puts it, "once the errors borrowed by the Folio from the later Quartos have been eliminated, only the First Quartos and the First Folio have any textual value".<sup>12</sup> At one time, only F<sub>1</sub> was considered to be the authoritative text; now the earlier Good Quarto, where one such is available, is given equal if not even greater authority. The subsequent editions (the more important among them, at least) call for careful collation so that the final text can be decided upon. The text thus determined, there is the problem of elucidating the 'cruxes'—sometimes through emendations, sometimes through annotations. The 'Dramatis Personae' and the act-and-scene division, a legacy from the 17th and 18th centuries, are usually retained; spelling is modernised as a general rule (except in editions meant exclusively or mainly for the specialist); but punctua-

<sup>10</sup> *Prolegomena*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> *The Editorial Problem*, p. ix.

<sup>12</sup> *Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates and the Problems of the Transmission of His Text*, p. 84.

tion and stage-directions always offer many ticklish problems. The *New Shakespeare* is rather lavish in its stage-directions, but most editors even today are conservative in this matter, and are content with the usual 'Enter', 'Exit' and 'Exeunt' of the earlier editions. Punctuation, however, holds the key to the understanding of the text, and much study has accordingly been expended on this problem. In the Quartos (and even the Folios, though to a much lesser extent), punctuation was a guide to the actor, indicating how Shakespeare meant his speeches to be delivered. The commas, semicolons, colons and brackets indicated where and how long the actor should pause. In other words, punctuation marks were really "stage-directions in shorthand", and to forget this and to give them all their normal grammatical relevance of emphasis is to be led into a blind alley. In his *Shakespeare Lecture* given before the British Academy, Peter Alexander laid down these guiding principles with regard to the punctuation of the plays :

"... one should focus all the evidence from intrinsic and transcriptional probability, from the internal evidence of the document and from the relevant evidence in documents of similar family descent. This is 'to hear all the evidence continuously'".

"Consider each passage in the light of the document as a whole and ... remember the habits of the man who punctuated it".<sup>13</sup>

After the late Alfred Thielton, Alexander has also elaborated the distinction between 'internal' and 'external' punctuation. The difference between the F<sub>1</sub> punctuation and modern punctuation may be illustrated by two or three extracts :

Deare Duff, I prythee contradict thyselfe,  
And say, it is not so.

(*Macbeth*, II. iii. 87)

Dear Duff, I prithee, contradict thyself,  
And say it is not so.

(W. J. Craig)

Dear Duff, I prithee contradict thyself,  
And say it is not so.

(Alexander)

All modern editions omit the comma after "And say", while Alexander has omitted the comma after "I prithee" too. Here is another example :

<sup>13</sup> *Shakespeare's Punctuation* (1945), pp. 9, 21.



## SHAKESPEARE

Romeo slew him, he slew Mercutio,  
Who now the price of his deare blood doth owe.

(F<sub>1</sub> : III. i. 179)

Romeo slew him, he slew Mercutio ;  
Who now the price of his dear blood doth owe ?

(New Clarendon)

Romeo slew him ; he slew Mercutio.  
Who now the price of his dear blood doth owe ?

(Alexander)

The comma of the Folio at the end of the first line is changed into a semicolon or a full-stop ; the full-stop at the end of the second line is changed into a mark of interrogation. Now for a final example, from *Hamlet* (V. i. 219) :

Her Obsequies haue bin as farre enlarg'd,  
As we haue warrantis, her death was doubtfull,  
And but that great Command, o're-swaies the order,  
She should in ground vnsanctified haue lodg'd,  
Till the last Trumpet.

(Folio)

Her obsequies have been as far enlarg'd  
As we have warrantise. Her death was doubtful ;  
And, but that great command o'ersways the order,  
She should in ground unsanctified have lodg'd  
Till the last trumpet ; ...

(Alexander)

The commas after "enlarg'd" and "order" have been eliminated, the commas after "warrantis" and "doubtfull" have been replaced by a full-stop and a semicolon respectively, and the stop after "Trumpet" has been replaced by a semicolon. Always, it will be seen, the shift is from dramatical to grammatical punctuation, from the playhouse to the study.

## IV

## THE ROLE OF CONJECTURE

We have seen that, of the 36 plays included in the First Folio, 16 (*The Tempest*, *Verona*, *Measure for Measure*, *Errors*, *As You Like It*, *All's Well*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Winter's Tale*, *1 Henry VI*, *Henry VIII*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline*) were printed for the first time ; 12 others (*Much Ado*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Dream*, *Richard II*,

*The Merchant of Venice*, 1 and 2 *Henry IV*, *Richard III*, *Troilus, Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear*) were reprinted from the Good Quartos, either verbatim, or after correction and supplementation by reference to a manuscript (that is, the prompt-book, the play-house manuscript, or the author's foul papers); and the remaining 8 plays (*King John*, *Merry Wives*, *The Shrew*, 2 and 3 *Henry VI*, *Henry V*, *Hamlet* and *Othello*) were printed from authoritative manuscripts, avoiding the Bad Quartos of the first 6 and even the Good Quartos of the last 2 (viz., *Hamlet* and *Othello*). If the  $F_1$  reading gives rise to difficulties in interpretation, what is the editor to do? With regard to the first group of 16 plays, there is but a single authoritative text. Under the circumstances, conjecture could — and has — run riot. A classic example is from *The Tempest* (III. i. 14) :

But these sweet thoughts, doe euen refresh my labours,  
Most busie lest, when I doe it.

As many as 15 pages are devoted in Furness's New Variorum edition to these 2 lines, and among the countless conjectural emendations are "Most busie least", "least busy", "Most busie-less" (Theobald), "Most busiliest", "Most lustiest" (Tannenbaum), "Most busiest when idlest", "Most busy left when idlest" and "Most busy — idlest when I dote", etc. However, the new *Arden* editor, Frank Kermode, thinks that no emendation is necessary: Shakespeare wrote 'busielest' (a superlative form of the adverb, *busily*) and the copyist or compositor split that single word into two "busie lest". After modernising the spelling, Kermode prints the line as

Most busilest when I do it

and annotates it as follows :

"Ferdinand is perfectly cheerful, and returns to his task knowing that his sweet thoughts, so far from being present only when he idles, will attend him even more assiduously when he works".<sup>14</sup>

But Alexander's reading is : "Most busy, least when I do it". Percy Simpson pointed out over 50 years ago that the comma after "lest" was probably mere dramatical punctuation, and "lest" could be read as "least". In explanation of his reading, Alexander says : "The sense is clear : Ferdinand is busiest when

<sup>14</sup> *The Tempest* (The New Arden, 1961 impression), p. 73.

thinking of Miranda, and the text can stand when the dramatist's punctuation is translated into modern terms."<sup>15</sup> But if 'Back to the Folio!' is the proper battle-cry for the modern Shakespearean editor, it must be conceded that Kermode's reading is nearer to F<sub>1</sub> than Alexander's.

Here is another example, from *Macbeth* (III. iv. 130) :

If trembling I inhabit then, protest mee  
The Baby of a Girl.

Endless are the variant readings suggested : "If blenching I evade it" (Bailey) ; "If trembling I inhabit, then protest me" (Johnson) ; "If trembling I inhibit, then" (Pope, Theobald, Hanmer, Warburton) ; "If trembling I inhibit then" (Capell) ; "If trembling I inhibit thee" (Steevens) ; "If tremblingly I inhabile then" ; "If trembling I inhabit there" (Delius) ; "If trembling I unknight me then" (Bulloch). Again, as in Johnson's edition, a mere shift in the comma (like the shift in Alexander's reading of the line from *The Tempest*) should suffice : "If trembling I inhabit, then protest me . . ."

Even the opening lines of *Macbeth* have been the subject of acute editorial controversy :

When shall we three meet again ?  
In Thunder, Lightning, or in Raine ?

Most standard editions omit the mark of interrogation after "again", but both Kenneth Muir (in the new *Arden*) and Alexander, following F<sub>1</sub>, have restored the mark, and the lines now read :

When shall we three meet again ?  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain ?

Dover Wilson, however, reviewing Muir's edition in the *Review of English Studies*, deplores this harking back to the Folio. What the 1st Witch asks is *when* she and her sisters should meet again, — the thunder, lightning and rain being always taken for granted.<sup>16</sup> But it may be argued that merely because an emendation or a change in the punctuation would yield a better meaning, we should not discard the received text so long as the reading, as it

<sup>15</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 5, p. 3. (Alexander's paper is entitled 'Restoring Shakespeare : The Modern Editor's Task').

<sup>16</sup> Like Dover Wilson, C. J. Sisson also omits the interrogation mark at the end of the first line.

stands, conveys a meaning not quite repugnant to the context. The editor's task is to make Shakespeare intelligible, not to seek to improve upon him.

Lady Macbeth's soliloquy after reading her husband's letter has proved one of the maddening cruxes in Shakespeare (I. v. 19) :

Thou'd'st haue, great Glamys, that which cries,  
Thus thou must doe, if thou haue it ;  
And that which rather thou do'st feare to doe,  
Than wishest should be vndone.

Pope inserted inverted commas at the beginning of the second line and closed them at the end of the passage, as it is done in the Cambridge Shakespeare as well. Hanmer closed the inverted commas at the end of "it" in l. 20, while Joseph Hunter closed at the end of "do". Craig's text reads :

thou'dst haue, great Glamis,  
That which cries, ' Thus thou must do, if thou haue it ' ;

but Alexander's lineation conforms to the Folio's and he closes the quotes like Hunter :

Thou'dst haue, great Glamis, that which cries  
' Thus thou must do ' if thou haue it . . .

But how is the passage to be explained ? Perhaps, the most satisfying is H. Hamill's annotation.<sup>17</sup> Lady Macbeth isn't balancing the crown of Scotland against the liquidation of Duncan : one is involved in the other, and to Lady Macbeth's clear vision "the two are one". The earlier part of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy is Euphuistic and is riddled with antitheses. "It is therefore both artistically and psychologically necessary", says Hamill, "that her culminating remark should be antithetical . . . there is but one thing which tells a man his duty. It is the voice of conscience. If he has a conscience it will speak." In the opinion of Lady Macbeth, her husband would like to be a man of conscience, —

Thou'dst haue, great Glamis,  
That which cries, ' Thus thou must do ', if thou haue it.

But, at the same time, the seeds of corruption have begun to nullify the categorical imperatives within him, and so he'd have the death of Duncan —

. . . that which rather thou dost fear to do  
Than wishest should be undone.

<sup>17</sup> *Journal of the Bombay University*, Vol. IV, Part 3, pp. 73-4.

Leaving *Macbeth*, let us turn now to *Antony and Cleopatra*, — it is Cleopatra speaking (V. ii. 95) :

You Lye vp to the hearing of the Gods :  
But if there be, nor euer were one such  
It's past the size of dreaming.

Most editions change "nor" to "or" ; W. J. Craig, for example, prints the second line thus : "But, if there be, or ever were, one such . . ." But Alexander, following Thiselton, restores the Folio reading but shifts the comma :

But if there be nor ever were one such,  
It's past the size of dreaming.

Surely, "if there (neither) be nor ever were one such" is not less intelligible, and is perhaps more relevant, than "if there be, or ever were, one such". What Cleopatra means is that, since there are no persons alive or dead to compare with Antony, his greatness "exceeds our powers of imagination".<sup>18</sup>

*Twelfth Night* offers another interesting example. Malvolio appears before Olivia yellow-stockinged and cross-gartered, and the following conversation takes place (III. iv. 31) :

Olivia. God comfort thee : Why dost thou smile so, and kisse  
thy hand so oft ?  
Maria. How do you Malvolio ?  
Malvolio. At your request :  
Yes Nightingales answere Dawes.

Craig's text reads : "At your request ! Yes ; nightingales answer daws !" The *New Shakespeare* reads :

Malvolio (disdainful). At your request ! Yes, nightingales  
answer daws.

The point at issue is whether Malvolio's words are addressed to Maria or to Olivia. The stage-direction "disdainful" implies that Malvolio, though piqued by what he must have considered an intolerable situation, consents to give a reply to a social inferior like Maria. Alexander brings out the same meaning by changing the mark of exclamation to that of interrogation, "At your request ?" The meaning is brought out clearly by Deighton's paraphrase : "Yes, I will, for nightingales sometimes answer the

<sup>18</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 5, p. 9.

notes of jackdaws, and therefore, I may without loss of dignity answer the question of a mere servant like Maria". But, after all, is this the correct explanation? Hamill thinks that Malvolio is under the impression that Olivia, the Fortunate-Unhappy, has herself commended his smiles and as good as commanded him to smile in her presence. When she now asks him, "Why dost thou smile so . . . ?", Malvolio's natural answer is, "At your request!" Olivia is of course puzzled by the answer, and this Malvolio takes for maidenly blushing or confusion, and intending to help her out of her discomfiture adds gallantly: "Yes, nightingales answer daws". Indeed, even a proverbial mourner like the nightingale answers to the call of spring, indicated though it be only by the appearance of the dark-feathered daw. Likewise, even Olivia, given to mourning though she had been, has now responded to the call of Love, although it has come to her only in the garb of a puritanical steward!<sup>19</sup>

## V

## PRINCIPLES OF EMENDATION

We have seen that, where there is but one substantive text ( $F_1$ ), conjecture could be promiscuous with a vengeance. Punctuation could be mauled ("I have considered the punctuation as wholly in my power", said Johnson), the syntax could be twisted and turned, new words—or phrases—with little physical resemblance to the original could be substituted, and the most amazing exercises in explication could be offered in defence of the suggested new readings. The modern editor, however, is apt to walk warily, lest he should land himself in the abyss of absurdity. In his British Academy Lecture delivered in 1928, W. W. Greg enunciated some of the principles that should govern all experiments in emendation. A corrupt text like *Macbeth* may call for more conjectural experiments than a good text like *The Tempest*. In particular Greg insists that the editor should base his emendations, where absolutely necessary, on "a knowledge of the errors a compositor is likely to make in setting the type, and a knowledge

<sup>19</sup> *Journal of the Bombay University*, Vol. II, Part 3, pp. 14-5.

of those he is likely to make in reading his copy".<sup>20</sup> This would naturally involve an intimate knowledge of the conditions that prevailed in Elizabethan and Jacobean printing houses, the conditions too under which manuscripts were turned over to the printers for setting up, and an appreciation of the haphazard way proof-reading was done, generally without reference to the copy.

With regard to the second group of 12 plays, while the Good Quartos no doubt provided, directly or indirectly, the copy, the F<sub>1</sub> text showed variations from the Quarto texts, though the extent of the variations might differ from play to play. What Greg says (though in a slightly different connection) will be applicable to these plays :

"As a rule one text may be expected to correct the other. In cases of failure the two may have a common error, or different errors. If the latter, emendation is specifically limited by the necessity of accounting for both corruptions".<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, where the two texts agree, the itch for emendation should be resolutely resisted.

We may begin with two examples from *King Lear*, both taken from the storm scene (III. iv). Lear, according to the Quarto, asks Edgar :

Hast thou given all to thy two daughters, and art come to this ?

But the Folio reads :

Did'st thou giue all to thy Daughters ? And art thou come to this ?

Craig gives this passage as :

Didst thou give all to thy two daughters ? And art thou come to this ?

But both Alexander and C. J. Sisson omit "two", thus wholly restoring the Folio reading. A second passage (III. iv. 63) is even more interesting : the Quarto and the Folio readings respectively are —

What, his daughters brought him to this passe, Couldst thou saue nothing, didst thou giue them all ?

Ha's his Daughters brought him to this passe ? Could'st thou saue nothing ? Would'st thou give 'em all ?

<sup>20</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism, 1919-1935* (World's Classics), p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 87.

Q's "What, his" and F's "Ha's his" were brilliantly fused by Theobald into "What, have his", and most editors follow his emendation. Thus W. J. Craig:

What! have his daughters brought him to this pass?  
 Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give them all?

But Alexander and Sisson again return to the Folio:

What, has his daughters brought him to this pass?  
 Could'st thou save nothing? Would'st thou give 'em all?

"What" of Q and F's "has" are juxtaposed, and following Greg (who has remarked that Theobald's "have" for "has" is a mere sophistication), Alexander and Sisson have retained "has" as well as "would'st".

This art of fusing the readings in two more or less equally authoritative texts may be illustrated also with reference to a passage in *Othello* (V. ii. 71). In the bedchamber scene, Othello tells Desdemona that Cassio "hath confess'd". "What, my lord?" asks Desdemona. Othello answers (according to the Folio): "That he hath us'd thee". But the Quarto has a different reading: "That he hath — 'uds death"; as if, writes Furness, "Othello were choked and unable to utter the words". Furness, however, continues: "But Desdemona's next question ("How? unlawfully?") shows clearly, I think, that it is out of place here". On the contrary, Alexander argues that parts of the original speech have been distributed between the Quarto and the Folio, and hence the speech should really be:

That he hath — ud's death! — us'd thee.<sup>22</sup>

This not only completely chimes with the situation and Othello's agonised mood but also meets Furness's objection. Besides, thanks to the adroit assimilation of the Quarto into the Folio, Desdemona's question and Othello's answer make a line of verse that plausibly scans as well.

2 *Henry IV* has another ambiguous passage (IV. i. 70):

Wee see which way the streame of Time doth runne,  
 And are enforc'd from our most quiet there,  
 By the rough Torrent of Occasion.

Most editions change "there" into "sphere", but Alexander retains the Folio reading, even as he has retained the interroga-

<sup>22</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 5, p. 6.



tion mark at the end of the opening line in *Macbeth*. Even where the text is so unintelligible that a change seems to be called for, the editor must, while emending the passage, be also able to account for the corruption. *The Merchant of Venice* (III. i. 111) reads in the Folio as follows, the speaker being Shylock :

I thank thee good *Tuball*, good newes : ha, ha, here in Genowa.

This becomes in Craig's edition :

I thank thee, good Tubal. Good news, good news ! ha ! ha !  
Where ? in Genoa ?

But the American editors, Neilson and Hill, feeling convinced that the compositor has misread "herd" (=heard) as "here", made the change, and so the correct reading may very well be :

I thank thee, good Tubal. Good news, good news — ha, ha ! —  
heard in Genoa.<sup>23</sup>

There remains the third group of eight plays. With a Good and a Bad Quarto, or the Folio and a Bad Quarto, where the texts differ, the former must command greater authority. But Greg adds that "where they agree, we not only have direct transcriptional witness to what the author wrote, but we know, subject to certain possible exceptions, that this was what was actually spoken on the stage".<sup>24</sup> Thus, before emendation is ventured upon, all possibilities of elucidation with the received text should be explored. An attempt from *Merry Wives* (III. iii. 55) has been cited by Alexander. The Folio reads :

I see what thou wert if Fortune thy foe, were not Nature thy friend.

In W. J. Craig's edition and the *Globe* edition the passage is punctuated thus :

I see what thou wert, if Fortune thy foe were not, Nature thy friend.

But the Folio reading merely means : "I see what thou wert if Fortune (who is now your foe) — and not Nature — were your

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism, 1919-1935*, p. 94.

friend", which could be made clear if the line were punctuated thus :

I see what thou wert if Fortune thy foe were — not Nature —  
thy friend.<sup>25</sup>

Alexander has also given an example from 2 *Henry VI* to illustrate how even a Bad Quarto (here *The Contention*) can help to set right the Folio text. The Bad Q and F<sub>1</sub> readings respectively are :

*Captain.* Yes Poull.

*Suffolke.* Poull.

*Captain.* I Poull, puddle, kennell, sinke and durt...

*Lieutenant.* Poole, Sir Poole? Lord,  
I kennel, puddle, sinke, etc.

W. J. Craig and other modern editors, following Capell, print the passage thus :

*Captain.* Yes. Pole.

*Suffolk.* Pole!

*Captain.* Pool! Sir Pool! lord!

Ay, kennel, puddle, sink ...

But Alexander thinks that this corruption in the text must be the result of confusion on the part of the Folio printer, and therefore gives the conversation succinctly as follows (IV. i. 70) : <sup>26</sup>

*Lieutenant.* Poole!

*Suffolk.* Poole?

*Lieutenant.* Ay, kennel, puddle, sink ...

Sometimes, however, no juxtaposition of texts, no mere interpretative ingenuity, could dissipate the fog of obscurity surrounding a passage. In *Henry V*, while describing Falstaff's death, the Hostess says :

... after I saw him fumble with the Sheets, and play with Flowers, and smile vpon his fingers end, I knew there was but one way : for his Nose was as sharpe as a Pen, and a Table of greene fields.

All modern editors accept Theobald's emendation : " 'a babbl'd of green fields' " (babbl'd = babled = table, t & b and e & d being liable to be confused). Even with so brilliant a conjecture as

<sup>25</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 5, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

this, transcriptional probability is more important than mere contextual relevance.

Johnson said: "It has been my settled principle, that the reading of the ancient books is probably true, and therefore is not to be disturbed for the sake of elegance, perspicuity, or mere improvement of the sense". He would therefore first fasten on the old text "to see if there be any interstice, through which light can find its way". Although he too made conjectures, and often gave his approval to the emendations proposed by earlier editors (and even of Theobald, for whom he had no love, he said: "He collated the ancient copies, and rectified many errors"), he frankly admitted that "as I practised conjecture more, I learned to trust it less". Where it was his robust commonsense that determined Johnson's caution, the modern editor sees the need for caution on other, more scientific, grounds.<sup>27</sup> Greg categorically stresses the "interdependence of emendation and textual theory",<sup>28</sup> but this needs continual application as well as the ready play of imagination. If the editors of an earlier era allowed their fancy to roam freely in the fields of conjecture and exegesis, there is perhaps an equal danger in editors, armed cap-a-pe like the Ghost in *Hamlet* with the tools of the sciences of bibliography and linguistics, but missing the whole point and purpose of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry. There is more in Shakespeare's dramas than "facts and problems". Editing an old text, says McKerrow, "is a matter of experience and practice, as much as, and even more than, of theory".<sup>29</sup> And the understanding and enjoyment of dramatic poetry, — and emendation as only an accessory to such understanding and enjoyment, — are the result "not of science, but of an informed and disciplined imagination".<sup>30</sup> Kirschbaum too says, in the Introduction to his monograph on *The True Text of 'King Lear'* (1945), that textual criticism "is not a science but an art". The great Shakespearian editor, expert as he should be in his competence

<sup>27</sup> J. R. Macphail writes: "Now it is not enough to offer a guess that Shakespeare wrote a different word from the one printed: the critic today must show how the wrong word comes to be there. J. Dover Wilson regularly uses this test". (*The Preface to Shakespeare*, Indian Edition 1944, p. 141).

<sup>28</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism, 1919-1935*, p. 107.

<sup>29</sup> *Prolegomena to the Oxford Shakespeare*, p. vi.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. viii.

to handle the modern tools of bibliography and linguistic science, is primarily a lover of dramatic poetry, richly endowed with "an informed and disciplined imagination".

## VI

## FROM TEXTUAL TO LITERARY CRITICISM

We have seen how, like everyday life in the atomic age, Shakespeare studies too are becoming terribly and increasingly complicated. People — experts, amateurs, actors, historians, philosophers, literary historians, imaginative critics — are constantly thinking, speculating and writing about him. An annual *Shakespeare Survey* is being issued from England and a *Shakespeare Quarterly* from America. The so-called 'Shakespeare industry' is a very flourishing concern with global ramifications. "There are already more books about Shakespeare than we can read", says L. C. Knights, — "that is, if we want to read Shakespeare or anything else".<sup>31</sup> And still they come, and often they are most welcome. But even in the atomic age — "in time of 'the Breaking of Nations'" — human history is at bottom a very simple affair. Likewise, the student of Shakespeare may, if he likes, turn his eyes away from the facade of modern scholarship and rest content with losing himself in the worlds of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, or cultivating the companionship of Falstaff, Dogberry, Autolycus. A phrase ("Off, off, you lendings!") "Out, out, brief candle!") acts like magic; it is as though one has inadvertently muttered 'Open Sesame', for there is a quick jumble of the categories of space and time, and one experiences a sudden sense of the soul's awakening, a flutter in the heart, a quickening of the very tempo of life. Negation seems to lead to a new affirmation, and death once dead there seems to spring from it the resurrection and the life. The magic, the miraculous power, of poetry is almost always there — what more does one want?

This is nevertheless a false simplification of the problem. The clean text that makes such escape, such emotional or spiritual excitement, possible is, after all, the result of the labours of

<sup>31</sup> *Some Shakespearean Themes* (1959), p. 10.

countless researchers, scholars, editors, critics. All the myriad conundrums that tantalise us in life pursue us also even when we turn to the study of Shakespeare — the apparently obvious is seen to be a complex of surmises, and logic is found overreaching itself and imagination is seen turning sour through its own excess. It is very pleasant to handle one of the new *Arden* volumes, or a single-volume edition like Alexander's or Sisson's; but easy reading for us has meant hard labour for the editor himself;

But O what labour!  
O Prince, what pain!

It is true that the critic's main task is to interpret literature in a genuinely humane spirit. On the other hand, it is foolish to acquiesce in the idea, sometimes fanatically propagated, that literary appreciation and textual criticism are mutually exclusive, and that one is inferior or superior to the other. We needn't introduce a caste system among the lovers of good literature. The mother who bathes the child is no less the mother than when she hugs or kisses her, or provokes her innocent prattle. The text determines the direction of aesthetic or imaginative criticism, and sometimes one's imaginative responses to a character or a situation determine, however unconsciously, one's interpretation of a line, of a word.<sup>33</sup> Critics like Johnson carried on their broad shoulders the double burden of textual and literary criticism. The *New Shakespeare*, when it was first launched, seemed to be the collaborative achievement of Quiller-Couch a perceptive literary critic and Dover Wilson a hard-headed textual critic. When 'Q' retired from the literary editorship, Dover Wilson hoped to persuade Lytton Strachey to shoulder the responsibility, but Strachey's death in 1932 led to a change of plans and Wilson decided to be both the literary and textual critic from *Hamlet* onwards. Nor have we any room to regret his decision. Peter Alexander too has managed to fuse the functions of the textual and literary critic, as may be seen in his edition of the Complete Works as also in his Introductions to the individual plays and poems in the 4-volume Collins' edition. The 16-page Introduction to the

<sup>33</sup> For example, how are we to understand the 'Nunnery Scene' in *Hamlet*? What was the meaning of the word 'nunnery' intended by Hamlet? Dover Wilson's interpretations are contested by C. Narayana Menon in his note "A Stage Direction in the New Shakespeare 'Hamlet'" (*Modern Language Review*, XXXII, 3, July 1937, pp. 438-41).

Complete Works is a sunny and manly piece of writing and also a marvel of condensation of the material available in his *A Shakespeare Primer* and the earlier (and more voluminous) *Shakespeare's Life and Art* — and so we might go back to his first considerable work, *Shakespeare's 'Henry VI' and 'Richard III'*. It is interesting to watch Alexander, first getting a complete grip on a mere segment of the vast circumference of Shakespeare studies, then steadily covering the whole circle, and also purposefully pressing towards the centre and seizing it by force of inward vision and "an informed and disciplined imagination".

The primary aim of all editors is to give their readers a text as close as possible to the 'copy' prepared by Shakespeare himself. The problem is thus simply stated; but when one remembers the condition in which the early editions (the Quartos and the Folios) have come down to us, the vagaries of printing and publishing in the Elizabethan age, and the gigantic heaps of conjectural emendation which editors have thrown up with ant-like assiduity during the past 350 years, one realises how very difficult indeed the problem of settling the 'text' is. While every new edition is verily a grand co-operative achievement — for it owes so much to the labours of several generations of scholars — the judgement of any individual editor must still be "held accountable for every word and every comma of the text he prints".<sup>33</sup> A new editor, unless he weakly surrenders to the itch for originality, will be satisfied with making only those changes — necessarily few — which seem to be charged as it were with a self-evident authenticity. The *Globe* edition has been long enjoying the authority of a Vulgate; but the 'transvaluation of values' that has been witnessed during the last 50 years in Shakespearean scholarship has made imperative the need to incorporate it in the popular editions of the plays and poems. This Alexander and Sisson have done with conspicuous success in their respective editions of the Complete Works. They are both cautious editors, and rather conservative on the whole (in contrast with an editor like Dover Wilson), and their editions, although properly tuned to the present, do not imply any violent break with the past. They are in the *Globe* tradition, but they have not hesitated to incorporate the *sure* gains of the last half-century.

<sup>33</sup> Dover Wilson, in the *Review of English Studies*, Jan. 1952, p. 72.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PROBLEM OF CHRONOLOGY

#### I

#### EXTERNAL EVIDENCE AND TERMINAL DATES

We have seen how the balance of probability inclines to the view that Shakespeare, having left Stratford in (or not long after) 1585, must have reached London shortly (perhaps 2 or 3 years) before 1590, and remained there, except for occasional brief visits to his native place, till 1613. The Globe Theatre, of which he was one of the proprietors, was destroyed by fire on 29 June 1613, and it is plausible that Shakespeare now finally left for Stratford, terminating his long connection with the stage. His dramatic career had extended over a period of about 25 years and accounted for at least 37 plays; and he had also written 2 long poems, a sonnet-sequence, and a few odds and ends. In what order were these written? The First Folio gave pride of place to *The Tempest*; *Measure for Measure* preceded *The Comedy of Errors*, *Richard II* preceded *Richard III*, and *Coriolanus* preceded *Julius Caesar*. Was this also the order in which Shakespeare wrote them? Surely *The Tempest* was not the very first of his dramatic compositions! Malone made an attempt to fix the chronological order, and made many shrewd guesses; but it was the 'New Shakespeare Society' under F. J. Furnivall's inspiration that set out to do this from 1874 onwards in a professedly 'scientific' manner. The problem of 'dating' a Shakespearian play is complicated by certain other factors as well. Having written a play and having had it produced, didn't Shakespeare take it up later with a view to revising it for a new production? Dover Wilson thinks that there were revisions, and

from prosodical and other clues deduces when and how often the revisions took place. *Love's Labour's Lost*, for example, could be one of the earliest plays; it could also be classed with the maturer comedies. The new *Arden* editor, Richard David, examines the available evidence and concludes that the play belongs to the 1593-4 period, though it was revised later, probably in 1597. On the other hand, Alfred Hart asserts that "we have no evidence that he (Shakespeare) ever revised a line of his own work".<sup>1</sup> To see revision everywhere and to deny that Shakespeare ("whatsoever he penn'd") never blotted out a line are equally extreme views. Again, where a later version reads better, are we to call it a revised and improved version, or merely that it is a corrected copy of the earlier Bad Quarto — that is, a new text with those passages restored that had been cut or mutilated in the corrupt text? Supposing that there was revision, after all, and on a substantial scale, is the play to be given the earlier or the later date? Where all is slippery, we have to walk with circumspection, qualify our statements at almost every turn, and hope for the best.

Evidence sought by scholars to fix the individual dates and the chronological order of the plays is generally arrayed under three heads: external; internal-external, i.e., partly internal and partly external; and wholly internal. External evidence relating to the date of a play is evidence that lies outside the play itself. A printed copy of a play known to be Shakespeare's with the date of publication indicated on the title-page would be such evidence. *The True Tragedie*, for example, was published in 1595; although the author's name is not given, we know that it is the "pirated" version of the play now referred to as *3 Henry VI*. *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* was published in 1591 and *Romeo and Juliet* in 1597, both Bad Quartos. Shakespeare's name started appearing on the title-pages of his plays from 1598, when both *Richard II* and *Richard III* were issued by Andrew Wise, although these plays had come out

<sup>1</sup> *Stolne and Surreptitious Copies, A Comparative Study of Shakespeare's Bad Quartos*, p. 447. But Pollard writes: "... in most of the plays, if we look closely enough into them, we shall find enough discrepancies, enough evidence of what seems imperfect revision, enough diversity of style, to tempt us to believe that Shakespeare wrote all his plays in the years of his dramatic apprenticeship and spent the rest of his working life in constantly rewriting them. That theory is not much more untenable than its opposite ..." (*Aspects of Shakespeare*, 1933, p. 15).



anonymously the previous year, again from the same publisher. It is obvious that the dates furnished by the title-pages are useful only as terminal dates, giving a later (or downward) limiting date before which the play must certainly have been composed and perhaps produced (and even published) as well. Of even greater importance are entries in the Stationers' Register, where for a fee of 6d. any publisher could record his intention of issuing a particular book (or play) and thereby protect its copyright. Not only *Venus and Adonis* (18 April 1593), *The Rape of Lucrece* (9 May 1593) and the *Sonnets* (20 May 1609), but the following plays also were thus regularly entered in the Register :

<i>Titus Andronicus</i> ,	6 February 1594 ;
<i>The Contention</i> (2 <i>Henry VI</i> ),	12 March 1594 ;
<i>The Taming of a Shrew</i> ,	2 May 1594 ;
<i>Richard II</i> ,	29 August 1597 ;
<i>Richard III</i> ,	20 October 1597 ;
<i>1 Henry IV</i> ,	25 February 1598 ;
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> ,	22 July 1598 ;
<i>Henry V</i> ,	4 August 1600 ;
<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> ,	4 August 1600 ;
<i>2 Henry IV</i> ,	23 August 1600 ;
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> ,	8 October 1600 ;
<i>Merry Wives</i> ,	18 January 1602 ;
<i>Hamlet</i> ,	26 July 1602 ;
<i>Troilus and Cressida</i> ,	7 February 1603 ;
<i>King Lear</i> ,	26 November 1607 ;
<i>Pericles</i> ,	20 May 1608.

All these, again, are terminal dates, and indicate only a lower or downward limit. Of almost equal relevance are references to the performances of particular plays. The Revels Account for 1604-5 mentions Court performances of *The Moor of Venice* (obviously *Othello*) on 1 November 1604, *Measure for Measure* on 26 December 1604, and a few other plays. The *Gesta Grayorum*, under 28 December 1594, mentions a performance of *The Comedy of Errors*, which is the first 'external' evidence of the existence of this play. Thomas Platter's diary for 21 September 1599 likewise mentions a performance of "the tragedy of the first Emperor Julius with at least fifteen characters well

acted", obviously a reference to *Julius Caesar*; but the diary also adds, curiously enough :

"At the end of the comedy they danced according to their custom with extreme elegance. Two in men's clothes and two in women's gave this performance, in wonderful combination with each other."<sup>2</sup>

John Manningham's Diary for 2 February 1602 mentions a performance of *Twelfth Night*, and makes particular mention of the gulling of Malvolio :

"A good practise in it to make the Steward beleieve his Lady widdowe was in love with him, by counterfeyting a letter as from his Lady in general termes, telling him what shee liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his appaiaile, &c., and then when he came to practise making him beleue they tooke him to be mad"<sup>3</sup>

There can be no doubt which play is meant. Likewise, Simon Forman's *Book of Plaies* gives descriptions of performances of *Macbeth* (20 April 1610), *Cymbeline* (undated: 1610?), and of *The Winter's Tale* (15 May 1611). The Revels Account for 1611-12 refers to a performance of *The Tempest* at Whitehall before the King on 1 November 1611. Sir Henry Wotton's letter to Sir Edmund Bacon makes mention of the fire which broke out during a performance of *All is True* (*Henry VIII*) at the Globe on 29 June 1613, as a result of which the theatre was burnt down,—"being thought at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole house to the very grounds"<sup>4</sup>.

Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592), with its clear echo of a line—*Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*—in *3 Henry VI* (V. iv. 137) and Thomas Nashe's reference in his *Pierce Penniless*, also published in 1592, to "braue Talbot" (in *1 Henry VI*) are further clear pointers to the position of the *Henry VI* plays. It is at any rate obvious that they preceded, not followed (as

<sup>2</sup> Charles Williams, *A Short Life of Shakespeare with the Sources*, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 186. Many plays (including Shakespeare's) in manuscript—prompt copies especially—must have perished in the fire. Had there been no fire, we should perhaps have had a more definitive text of several of Shakespeare's plays. Perhaps, too, some of Shakespeare's plays are now totally lost because of that fire.

they do in the Folio and in the familiar collected editions of the plays) the plays in the Lancastrian tetralogy. The following lines in Robert Tofte's *Alba* (1598) —

Loues Labour Lost, I once did see a Play  
Ycleped so, so called to my paine —

give the play's terminal date. The following passage in John Weever's *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1601) —

The many-headed multitude were drawn  
By Brutus' speech that Caesar was ambitious.  
When eloquent Mark Antony had shown  
His virtues, who but Brutus then was vicious? —

unquestionably recalled the orations of Brutus and Antony in *Julius Caesar*, but the terminal date could be pushed back to 1599 because of Platter's note already referred to. Of capital importance too are certain entries in the Diaries of Philip Henslowe, the influential but little educated Elizabethan playhouse financier. He marked as "ne" (i.e. a new play, at least a newly revived play) *1 Henry VI* (3 March 1592) and *Titus Andronicus* (24 January 1594). Above all, from Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia* (1598) we can infer which of Shakespeare's plays had been definitely written before that year. After mentioning Shakespeare alongside of Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Marlowe and Chapman, Meres continues :

"As *Plautus* and *Seneca* are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines : so *Shakespeare* among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage ; for Comedy, witnes his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Loue labors lost*, his *Loue labours wonne*, his *Midsummers night dreame*, & his *Merchant of Venice* : for Tragedy his *Richard the 2.* *Richard the 3.* *Henry the 4.* *King Iohn*, *Titus Andronicus* and his *Romeo and Iuliet*".

The identity of *Love's Labour's Won* hasn't been established beyond doubt, but Sir Edmund Chambers is inclined to think that the title fits best *The Taming of the Shrew*.<sup>5</sup> More recent research seems to rule this out, and it has been suggested by F. E. Halliday that "the reference is to an early version of *All's Well That Ends Well*, a play for which the alternative title of 'Love's

<sup>5</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Study of Facts and Problems*, Vol. I, p. 273.

Labour's Won' would be particularly appropriate".<sup>6</sup> Leslie Hotson, however, thinks that *Troilus and Cressida* is the play Meres had in mind.<sup>7</sup>

## II

## INTERNAL EVIDENCE

Internal-external evidence regarding the date of a play is evidence that links up episodes, characters or sentiments in the play with historical events or facts. For example, there is the following passage in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (II. i. 106) :

And thorough this distemperature we see  
The seasons alter : hoary-headed frosts  
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose ;  
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown  
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds  
Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,  
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change  
Their wonted liveries ; and the mazed world,  
By their increase, now knows not which is which.

Unless we choose to dismiss the lines as a later interpolation, we should infer from this obvious allusion to a contemporary event that the play was written subsequent to the unusual rainy weather experienced in England during the summer of 1594. Again, it is very likely that Essex's Irish campaign inspired Shakespeare's lines in *Henry V* (V. Pro. 29) :

As, by a lower but loving likelihood,  
Were now the General of our gracious Empress—  
As in good time he may—from Ireland coming,  
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword ...

Since the campaign began in March and ended in September 1599, the presumption is in favour of 1599 being the date of composition of the play. Another neat clue is provided by the fact that *Richard II* is used in the second edition of Daniel's

<sup>6</sup> *The Life of Shakespeare* (1961), p. 139. In his British Academy Lecture (1923), A. W. Pollard held the same view. (*Aspects of Shakespeare*, p. 9).

<sup>7</sup> *Shakespeare's Sonnets Dated*, pp. 37 ff.

*Civil Wars between Lancaster and York* and itself uses the first edition, both editions however appearing in the course of 1595: this lends colour to the definite possibility that the first production of *Richard II* might have taken place during 1595. In like manner, the use of Robert Jones's *First Book of Songs and Aires* (1600) in *Twelfth Night*, the song-scrap in II. iii. 109-21 being evidently taken from that book, points to 1600-1 as the date of composition of the play. Again, the allusion to the boy actors in *Hamlet* (II. ii. 335) —

. . . there is, sir, an eyrie of children, little cyases, that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapped for't. These are now the fashion —

gives 1599 as the initial (i.e. earlier or upper) limit for the composition of the play, while the allusion to eclipses in *King Lear* (I. ii. 112) — "These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us" — suggests late 1605 (for the eclipses took place on 27 September and 2 October 1605 respectively) as its probable time of composition. Similar, but perhaps more ambiguous, allusions could be found in other plays as well, e.g. *Macbeth* (allusion to the Scottish Kings, which indicates a date subsequent to 25 March 1603), *Love's Labour's Lost* (the veiled attack on Chapman's *Shadow of Night*, indicating 1594 as the probable date of the play's first composition), and the hint about the forthcoming *Henry V* in the Epilogue to *2 Henry IV*.

Purely 'internal' evidence, on the other hand, is evidence relating to the date of composition of a play provided by the subject-matter, dramatic treatment, thought, style, imagery, vocabulary, versification, and general tone of the play. In applying the so-called 'internal' tests, subjectivity inevitably plays a great part. Shall we say that tragedies are of later, comedies of earlier, date? This is true upto a point, — but we cannot make a law of it, for we shall be confounded by the exceptions. Since many ideas and images from Shakespeare's poems reappear in *Love's Labour's Lost*, might we not conclude that, like them, the play also was written in 1593-4? And, like the 'Dark Lady' who figures in some of the sonnets, there is a dark lady in the play too, "the heavenly Rosaline". In view of their lack of lightness and brightness, shall we not club together the 'dark' comedies (otherwise known as the 'problem plays')? Likewise,

don't *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* belong to the fag end of Shakespeare's career? Within broad limits, — and notwithstanding Lytton Strachey's caveats against such seemingly specious reasoning, — these conclusions may be valid enough. But such purely subjective methods are not only inherently fallible but are also open to grave abuse when we lose ourselves in detail.

Trying to avoid the quicksands of subjectivity, many critics apply 'scientific' tests, turning over each play to the dissection table for microscopic analysis and report. How long is the play? How is the bulk distributed between prose and verse? What is the percentage of rhymed verse to the total? How frequent are the variations from the norm of the five-foot iambic blank verse? A higher percentage of rhymed verse is supposed to indicate an earlier play, a higher percentage of verse not strictly regular (i.e. not mechanically iambic, with 10 syllables in each line) is similarly supposed to indicate a later play. There are lines with extra syllables, lines with 'weak endings' (words like 'on', for example), lines whose 'sense' doesn't pause at the end of the line but overflows as it were to the next, lines broken and distributed between 2 or 3 speakers, in short, lines that deviate in one respect or another from the regulation mould of the iambic pentameter. It is taken for granted that, as Shakespeare grew older, as he gained increasing mastery of his medium, he came to take more and more liberties with the norm — without, however, quite breaking the base plank of the iambic pentameter. The laborious enumerations and calculations are associated with the formidable name of F. G. Fleay, while the related parallel tests and vocabulary tests are the fabrication of H. Conrad and G. Sarrazin respectively. According to Conrad, parallelism in idea or sentiment in two or more plays points to the same period of composition (as with *Love's Labour's Lost* and the poems, or *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*); according to Sarrazin, parallelism in the use of particular words ('blazon' in both *Merry Wives* and *Hamlet*; 'ravin' in *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*; 'ropery' in *The Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet*) also points to the same conclusion. However thorough these investigations, such 'internal' tests — call them verse tests, parallel tests, or vocabulary tests — are of little absolute value, though they can often be used to advantage as cor-

roborative evidence in favour of an earlier or a later date for a particular play or group of plays. "They are best used", says Charles Williams, "as controls for the indications of external evidence".<sup>8</sup>

A few random examples must suffice. The essential verse test is simply this : more freedom, more variation, means a later, maturer play, while more order, more regularity, means an earlier play when Shakespeare was still mastering his craft. One has to be a perfect master of a technique before one can rise superior to it, and almost laugh at the mastery itself. Freedom and variation are indicated (among other things) by a high percentage of (1) double-endings (an extra-syllable after the final stressed syllable) and (2) run-on lines (sense overflowing the line-endings), and a large number of light-endings and weak-endings (the line ending with a weak or very weak unstressed monosyllable like *were*, *her*, *and*, *on*, *or*, *to*, etc.). In *1 Henry VI*, the percentage of double endings is 8, and of run-on lines is 10 ; the number of light and weak endings is 4. The corresponding figures for *Hamlet* are 23, 23, and 8 ; for *Macbeth*, 26, 37, and 23 ; for *Antony and Cleopatra*, 27, 43, and 99 ; for *Coriolanus*, 28, 46, and 104. Converting the number of light and weak endings in terms of percentage, we find that such endings come to about 1% of the total in *Love's Labour's Lost*, 2% in *Hamlet*, 2.5% in *Measure for Measure*, 11% in *Macbeth*, and 33% in *The Tempest*. These are clear external indications of the evolution and growth of the poet's style and versification, and while we may not give them the force of a law, we needn't spurn such assistance as we can gain from them in our attempts to study the subtle processes of Shakespeare's development as a dramatic artist and poet.

### III

#### THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE PLAYS AND POEMS

We have seen that purely 'external' evidence gives only a lower limit : thus, a date shown on the title-page, an entry in the Stationers' Register or a contemporary diary or the Revels

<sup>8</sup> *A Short Life of Shakespeare*, p. 116. See Appendix II for the Table of Metrical and Other Statistics.

Accounts, shows that the play must have been written *before* the date indicated. Internal-external ('partly internal, partly external') evidence, on the other hand, like allusions in the play to contemporary events or quotations from contemporary publications (there is, for example, a quotation from Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, 1598, in *As You Like It*), shows that the play must have been written *after* the date indicated, thus providing an upper limit. When we have both a lower and an upper limiting date, or at least either of them, we can seek the help of purely 'internal' evidence (thought, style, versification, vocabulary, etc.) to confirm the indications of the other more objective types of evidence. Taking into consideration all probabilities and all the known facts and correspondences, as also the mass of inferences based on subjective, aesthetic, metrical, parallel, and vocabulary tests, scholars have been able to plot out the chronology of the plays and poems. No two scholars quite agree in every particular, and occasionally there is violent disagreement about the dating of a play. E. K. Chambers, G. B. Harrison, T. M. Parrott, G. L. Kittredge, Peter Alexander, and the editors (J. R. Brown and B. Harris) of the volume *Early Shakespeare* (1961) are among the numerous scholars who, after considering more or less the same evidence in its baffling richness and complexity, have achieved tentative chronologies which look substantially alike and are yet different in minor particulars. The glittering pieces in the kaleidoscope are the same; yet, each time we shake it, a somewhat different pattern seems to emerge. The following table too is no more than strictly tentative:

- 1 Henry VI* (1588-9)
- 2 Henry VI* (1589-90)
- 3 Henry VI* (1590-91)
- Richard III* (1591)
- King John* (1591)
- (Bad Quarto, 1591)
- Titus Andronicus* (1592)
- The Comedy of Errors* (1592)
- (Alexander dates it before 1589)
- The Taming of the Shrew* (1593)
- (Bad Quarto, 1594)
- Venus and Adonis* (1593)



*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1593)

*Sonnets* (1593-6)

*The Rape of Lucrece* (1594)

*Love's Labour's Lost* (1594)

*Romeo and Juliet* (1594-5)

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594-5)

(Allusion to the bad weather of 1594)

*The Merchant of Venice* (1595)

(Allusion to the death of the Jew, Roderigo Lopez, —  
IV. i. 134, — in June 1594)

*Richard II* (1595)

1 *Henry IV* (1596-7)

2 *Henry IV* (1597)

*Much Ado About Nothing* (1598)

(Not mentioned by Meres, 1598)

*As You Like It* (1598-9)

(Not mentioned by Meres)

*Henry V* (1599)

(Reference to Essex's Irish campaign in Act V)

*Julius Caesar* (1599)

(Platter's Diary, 21 September 1599)

*Twelfth Night* (1600)

(Use of *First Book of Airs*, 1600)

*The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1600)

("That the play is in any case later than *Henry V* is likely", says E. K. Chambers, but Alexander thinks that the play was first performed on 23 April 1597)

*Hamlet* (1600-1)

(Allusion to the boy actors, 1599)

*Troilus and Cressida* (1601)

(Echo in l. 23 of Prologue to Jonson's *The Poetaster*, 1601. Harrison places it *before*, and Kittredge *after*, 1601)

*All's Well That Ends Well* (1602-3)

*Measure for Measure* (1603-4)

(Court performance, 24 December 1604)

*Othello* (1604)

("It must have been written about the same time as *Measure for Measure*", says Alexander)

*King Lear* (1605-6)

(Allusion to eclipses, 1605, and Court performance, 26 December 1606)

*Timon of Athens* (1605-6)

("Perhaps of about the date of *Lear*", says Alexander)

*Macbeth* (1606)

(Allusion — II. iii. 10 — to equivocation by the Gun Powder Plot conspirators in 1606. According to G. R. Elliott, *Macbeth* is the last of the four main tragedies)

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1607)

(Stationers' Register entry on 20 May 1608; probably influenced by Daniel's revised *Cleopatra*, 1607)

*Coriolanus* (1608)

(Probable allusion in Jonson's *The Silent Woman*, 1609)

*Pericles* (1608-9)

(Published in 1609)

*Cymbeline* (1609)

(Undated note in Forman's Diary, probably relating to 1610. "The verse shows the free use of light and weak endings, first developed in *Antony and Cleopatra*; the romantic tone connects it with *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*", says Alexander)

*The Winter's Tale* (1610-11)

(Forman's Diary, 15 May 1611)

*The Tempest* (1611)

(Court performance, 1 November 1611. Kittredge places *The Tempest* before *The Winter's Tale*)

*Henry VIII* (1612-3)

(Performance at the Globe Theatre, 29 June 1613. Parrott assigns both *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* to 1613)

Although there is still lack of absolute unanimity among scholars regarding the chronology of the plays and the poems, one thing at least is clear: the grouping of the plays in the First Folio under Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies, and the order in which the plays were printed under each of these headings, offer no indication whatsoever of the order of actual composition

of the plays. Hence the justification of the attempts to fix, however haltingly and tentatively, the chronological order of composition of the plays and the poems.

## IV

## THE 'FOUR-PERIOD' HYPOTHESIS

The determination of the chronological order of composition of the works of Shakespeare — however questionable the relative positions of some of the items, and however provisional the arrangement as a whole — is but the starting-point for further speculation and argument. "Unless a work of art is to be studied in absolute terms as a timeless contribution to human culture", writes James G. McManaway, "there can be no thorough understanding and appreciation of it until it has been fitted into a chronological pattern that will relate it to the other works in the canon and throw light on the development of the mind of the artist".<sup>9</sup>

A tragedy like *Macbeth*, being born in time, shares some of the limitations of time; the place and year of composition, the personality of the author and his circumstances when he wrote it, the meteorological conditions of contemporary thought and opinion, all have a part in the character and content of the play. On the other hand, it has also a timeless quality, for the stage is not the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage alone, not the Scotland of *Macbeth*'s time alone, but the human heart and soul of all times, all climes; the actors are moved by human emotions and passions that fight for mastery; and the struggle that we witness is the primal grapple between Good and Evil. The way of wisdom is to pass through time to the timeless, to take off from the hard ground to the yielding inviting regions above. To see a play, not merely as a self-sufficient entity, but also as one of a series that constitutes a complex totality — not merely view individual exhibits but mark the dynamics of movement, of progression, the urge to change, the striving towards worlds still unrealised — this surely could be an exciting intellectual inquiry and also a profound aesthetic adventure. As we move from the

<sup>9</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 4, p. 153.

early to the later plays of Shakespeare, it is clear that there is a change, development, a heightening, a movement towards new realms of experience and new ways of artistic expression. Yet, if we narrow down our gaze to 2 or 3 consecutive plays alone, these propositions may be difficult to sustain. In the course of about 25 years (1588-1613), Shakespeare the dramatic artist certainly changed, conditions in Elizabethan drama changed, there was the change from Gloriana to King James, and from Shakespeare's early contemporaries, the University Wits, to his later contemporaries, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, Dekker, Marston, Heywood and Ford. But although changes are obscurely going on all the time, they are not so clearly visible when we concentrate on a narrow segment of time or space. It is this fact of limitation that has led to the division of Shakespeare's career into 'periods' and the formulation of theories concerning the development of his art and thought.

In his *Shakspeare : His Mind and Art* (1875) and the compact *Shakspeare Primer* that followed two years later, Edward Dowden divided Shakespeare's career into four periods, corresponding to four stages in his development as an artist and parallel stages in the development of his mind.<sup>10</sup> These periods he called respectively 'In the Workshop', 'In the World', 'Out of the Depths' and 'On the Heights'. For about three decades this theory and its attendant corollaries with regard to the development of Shakespeare's diction and style and versification held the field with scarcely any demur, but after Strachey's now celebrated (and rather devastating) essay (1904), few critics have been inclined to go the whole length of the Dowdenian dogma. However, one way or another, the four-period classification has persisted. Walter Raleigh, for example, sees the progression from the early boisterous Comedies and prentice work in History, to the joyous Comedies and the mature Histories; then on to the Tragedies, and painful Comedies; and, finally, to the Romances. And Raleigh adds: "There is no escape from the broad lines of this classification".<sup>11</sup> Another critic, F. Madan, gives the 4 periods less flamboyant or melodramatic names than Dowden's:

<sup>10</sup> Gervinus had at first favoured 3 periods, and Furnivall 4, till Dowden's four-period hypothesis hardened into orthodoxy and came to command general acceptance.

<sup>11</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 131.

'Experiment', 'Development', 'The Tragedies', and 'The Romances'. Parrott also refers to the four periods: the first, of apprenticeship, ending about 1594; the second, of mastery of comedy and history, 1594-1600; the third, that of the tragedies and the 'bitter comedies', 1599-1608; and the last, that of the 'romances' or tragi-comedies, 1608-13.<sup>12</sup> George H. Cowling divides Shakespeare's career into the period of the Early Plays (1590-5), Middle Period of Comedy (1596-1600), Later Period of Tragedy (1600-1608), and the period of the Last Plays (1609-12). Dover Wilson's divisions are 'Comedy and Character', 'History and Politics', 'The Razor Edge', and 'The Enchanted Island'. Una Ellis-Fermor, in her inaugural lecture at Bedford College in 1947, described Shakespeare's progression as follows:

"First there is the experience of the comedy of the world, whose essential quality is perhaps the conviction of prevailing wholesomeness and rightness in life, the conviction that life is, on balance, a good arrangement... Next comes a revaluing, first in the Histories and then in the Tragi-comedies of the early years of the seventeenth century (a revaluation not a fresh beginning); and, after that, the superlative balance of the tragedies with the vast width of implication, the weight of thought, the reappraisal of the world of comedy, history and tragi-comedy in terms of inexplicable mystery, in which, yet, their values are preserved and placed... And, finally, there comes that phase in which wisdom and comprehension pass beyond the tragic balance, even as the poet's material passes, at moments, beyond the world he has hitherto discovered..."<sup>13</sup>

The key-phrases are: The comedy of the world; Revaluation of life in history and tragi-comedy; The superlative balance of the tragedies; and Wisdom and comprehension. Again, Allardyce Nicoll finds descriptive phrases of his own to describe the four periods: 'The Young Shakespeare at Work'; 'Man and Society'; 'Man and the Universe'; and 'The Inner Life'. In the Pelican book, *The Age of Shakespeare* (1955), the four periods reappear as 'The Young Dramatist', 'The Middle Years (1599-1603)', '*King Lear* and the Great Tragedies', and 'The Last Plays'. Alexander too has four periods, but he is more matter of fact in his nomenclature, and besides he links the four periods with changes in the theatrical conditions of Shakespeare's time:

<sup>12</sup> *William Shakespeare: A Handbook*, p. 126.

<sup>13</sup> *The Study of Shakespeare* (1948), pp. 14-5.

- From 20 to 30 (1584-94):* Alexander pushes the first period to 1584, though most other critics would go no further than 1588. Shakespeare might have worked for a time for Pembroke's men, along with Marlowe and Kyd.
- From 30 to 35 (1594-1599):* During this period Shakespeare was a 'sharer' in the Chamberlain's company, acting with Burbage and others at the Theatre.
- From 35 to 45 (1599-1608):* Moving with his company to the new Globe Theatre, Shakespeare was at the height of his powers as a dramatist.
- From 46 to 50 (1608-1613):* Shakespeare was associated with both the Globe and the Blackfriars Theatre, the small in-door theatre taken over from the children's company.

Yet another critic, D. L. Chambers, in his monograph on *The Metre of 'Macbeth'*, has viewed Shakespeare's progression mainly in terms of versification and metrical mastery, and has accordingly named the periods: 'The Vanity of Rhyme'; 'The Balance of Power'; 'The Discordant Weight of Thought'; and 'The Licence of Weak Endings'.

While almost all scholars agree about 1613 being the terminal year of Shakespeare's dramatic career (the fire that burnt down the Globe on 29 June seems verily to conclude the story with a bang), there is not the same unanimity about the initial date. At one time scholars were inclined to start at 1590 or 1591, which meant that Shakespeare began his career at the age of 26 or 27. Alexander, however, would take the initial date to 1587 or even earlier, and authoritative opinion is slowly veering round to this view. What do we know of the 'lost years', from 1585 (when Shakespeare's twins were christened at Stratford) to 1592 when Greene's *Groatworth of Wit* gave a sort of explosive publicity to Shakespeare the actor-doubled with a dramatist? Speculation is easy, but certainty is hard to reach. There is, however, some force in Alexander's argument that within a year or so of commencing his career as an actor and as a dramatist, Shakespeare could not possibly have provoked the envy and wrath of an established playwright like Greene. Nor was it likely that the unknown Stratford lad would have been asked by playhouse proprietors to revise the plays of University Wits like Peele, Greene

and Kyd. Recently, Leslie Hotson in his *Shakespeare's Sonnets Dated* (1949) has argued that the bulk of the sonnets (in fact over 100 of them) were written by Shakespeare between 1585 and 1589, thus pushing them back by 10 years from their traditional dating. The acceptance of this theory would mean, not only that Shakespeare's lyric genius had achieved full efflorescence by 1590, but also that, far from tamely following the current Elizabethan vogue of sonnet-writing (*Astrophel and Stella*, 1591; *Delia*, 1592; *Phyllis and Licia*, 1593; *Coelia and Idea*, 1594; *Amoretti*, 1595), it was actually Shakespeare that gave a start to the fashion. This theory and its implications are still being examined and disputed, and they have thus not yet accomplished the baptism of orthodoxy, but at any rate there is now no reason to suppose that Shakespeare began writing only after 1590. Whether as a country schoolmaster or as an actor in some company, Shakespeare could easily have attempted his first immature essays in History, Tragedy and Comedy, and also written some of the Sonnets.

## V

## THE 'SEVEN-PERIOD' DIVISIONS

Since definite proof is not forthcoming one way or the other, it is convenient to suppose that Shakespeare was in London by 1588 (the year of the Armada's destruction), perhaps with the first drafts of a play or two and a few sonnets in his possession. He might have worked as a schoolmaster between 1585 and 1587, and joined the Earl of Leicester's Company or the Queen's when it visited Stratford in 1587. A nodding acquaintance with Seneca, Plautus and Ovid on the one hand and a first-hand knowledge of theatrical conditions on the other might have stimulated the itch for writing, and plays like *Titus* and *The Comedy of Errors* were perhaps the first results. And so Shakespeare came to London, already a dramatist and a man of the theatre, and therefore found no difficulty in finding an opening for himself. He was with Pembroke's men, probably till they went on a tour of the provinces during 1592-4 when the plague raged in London. Both Pembroke's men and their rivals, Lord Strange's men (later the Lord Chamberlain's men), were out of London,

but Shakespeare probably remained in London.<sup>14</sup> By 1594, Pembroke's men 'broke', and Shakespeare and his plays moved to Lord Chamberlain's and with them he remained for the rest of his dramatic career. Shakespeare's first years in London, notwithstanding all scholarly probings, remain an obscure period. When exactly he began his career, for whom, in which plays he acted, what he did during the plague-ridden years, all raise questions that admit of wide solutions. The mists begin to clear after 1594, and that is when the 'second period' of Shakespeare's dramatic career hopefully starts. The 'first period' can thus be appropriately named, 'Mist and Fog'!

Although on the biographical side there is still so much that is mere surmise, there is now practical unanimity about the plays to be assigned to the first or early period of experimentation. Call it 'In the Workshop', or prentice work, or 'Young Shakespeare at Work', the sense is the same. Likewise, critics are on the whole agreed about the duration of the last period (1608-13), and the 5 plays to be assigned to it. The difficulty, then, is about the 20 plays bunched in the middle. Comedies, histories, 'dark' comedies, Roman plays, tragedies—these mingle together strangely, and refuse to be ordered into 2 neat groups. *Twelfth Night* is by no means a 'dark' comedy, yet it is wedged between *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, both of which are tragedies and have also been called 'problem' plays. There is nothing sacrosanct, after all, about the four-period division, and the aim is no more than the convenient grouping of the plays to facilitate the study of the development of Shakespeare's art and thought. Like Gervinus about a century ago, George Rylands too seems to prefer a three-period division. In his Introduction to the *New Clarendon* edition of *Hamlet* (1947), Rylands writes:

"Let us simplify the matter somewhat by saying that Shakespeare's dramatic career covered about twenty-one years which can be divided into three periods of seven years".

<sup>14</sup> Reese thinks that Shakespeare probably toured the provinces with one of the companies; or, perhaps, he became till the summer of 1594 "a member of Southampton's household, in London or at Titchfield, with his creative energy devoted rather to epic poetry than to the making of plays". (*Shakespeare: His World and His Work*, p. 205). It was, perhaps, at Titchfield too that Shakespeare made the acquaintance of John Florio, the translator of Montaigne, and so grew intimate with the work of the great French humanist. (See Dover Wilson, *The Essential Shakespeare*, p. 64.)



From 1591 to 1598, Shakespeare was "imitating, experimenting, and finding his feet"; during the next 7 years (1599-1605), he wrote his 3 great comedies, the 3 'problem comedies', and 3 tragedies (*Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* and *Othello*); the last seven-year period (1606-12) "begins with *Macbeth* and *King Lear* in which we find certain themes of guilt and expiation, of suffering and reconciliation, themes which (after another Roman interlude) are to find full expression in the final romances".<sup>15</sup> One advantage of this scheme is that it gives a central place to *Hamlet*, but surely to club the comedies (both sunny and dark) and the tragedies together is not very helpful, and is a good deal misleading. And Rylands is also obliged to do some marginal Procrustes' operations to adjust the known facts to his three-period theory.

In his study of *Shakespeare* (1949), Ivor Brown has suggested the following grouping of the plays and poems:

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Johannns Factotum,<br>1587-1592. | <i>I, 2 &amp; 3 Henry VI, Titus, Errors,<br/>The Shrew, Richard III, Two<br/>Gentlemen of Verona</i>                     |
| 2. Lyrical,<br>1592-1596.           | <i>Venus, Lucrece, LLL, Romeo, A<br/>Dream, The Merchant of Venice,<br/>Early Sonnets</i>                                |
| 3. Histories,<br>1596-1599.         | <i>King John, Richard II, I &amp; 2<br/>Henry IV, Henry V</i>  |
| 4. High Fantastical,<br>1599-1601.  | <i>Merry Wives, Much Ado, Twelfth<br/>Night, As You Like It</i>  |
| 5. Bitter Comedy,<br>1601-1603.     | <i>All's Well, Troilus, Measure for<br/>Measure</i>  |
| 6. The Dark Vision,<br>1600-1608.   | <i>Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Lear,<br/>Timon, Julius Caesar, Antony<br/>and Cleopatra, Coriolanus,<br/>Later Sonnets</i> |
| 7. Fancy Free,<br>1608-1613.        | <i>Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's<br/>Tale, The Tempest, Henry VIII</i>   |

Evidently recalling the seven ages of man described by Jacques in *As You Like It* (II. vii. 142), Ivor Brown calls his seven periods the (seven) "Ages of Shakespeare". But even here, 1 and 2 taken together roughly correspond to the traditional first

<sup>15</sup> pp. 15-7.

period, and 7 likewise corresponds to the traditional last period ; 5 and 6 are almost concurrent, and cover the traditional third (or tragic) period ; and 3 and 4 but arbitrarily divide the traditional second period. Thus, although Brown deserves some credit for his courage in striking out a line for himself by escaping from the four-period strait-jacket, his grouping under seven heads raises more difficulties than it solves, and makes the picture seem complex and confusing without achieving any comparable advantage.

No less unsatisfactory is Donald A. Stauffer's division into seven periods with names as fanciful as Ivor Brown's :

1. The Country Mouse     *1, 2 & 3 Henry VI, Titus, Richard III, Venus, Lucrece, Errors, Verona*
2. The School of Love     *LLL, The Shrew, Merry Wives, A Dream, R & J, The Merchant of Venice*
3. The Garden of Eden     *Much Ado, AYL, Twelfth Night, King John, Richard II, 1 & 2 Henry IV, Henry V*
4. The Unweeded Garden     *Julius Caesar, All's Well, Hamlet, Troilus, Measure for Measure*
5. The Dark Tower     *Othello, Lear, Macbeth*
6. Roads to Freedom     *Timon, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus*
7. A World of Images     *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest*

Stauffer's preoccupation is with the development of Shakespeare's moral ideas in so far as they may be inferred from a study of the plays and poems in their chronological sequence. Shakespeare wrote for a living, and he sought to entertain his audiences ; but was this all ? Did he not also inquire into the problem of human conduct, seeking a satisfying answer to the first and last question of all : How to live ? Stauffer's assumptions are that every great work of art reflects its creator's convictions, that it is pointless to see style and content as separate entities, and that poetic expression transcends mere logic ; also that Shakespeare insinuates his moral ideas alike in the choice of subject, the handling of

sources and the plotting, and the recurrent ideas and imagery. But to see Shakespeare's moral ideas as a developing — a deepening and heightening — force, it is necessary to take note of both "the complexity of his thought, and the changing nature of that thought over a career of twenty years".<sup>16</sup> Hence the seven-period division. It would, however, be difficult to justify pushing *Merry Wives* to the second and *King John* to the third period; and it is interesting to note that *Julius Caesar* is classed with the 'dark' comedies and *Hamlet*.

The actress and producer, Margaret Webster, in her *Shakespeare Today* (1957), also seems to prefer a seven-period division :

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. The Early Plays         | <i>Titus, Errors, The Shrew, Verona, LLL, R &amp; J, A Dream</i>         |
| 2. The Histories           | All the Histories, except <i>Henry VIII</i>                              |
| 3. The Comedies            | <i>Merry Wives, Much Ado, AYL, Twelfth Night, The Merchant of Venice</i> |
| 4. The Tragic Essence      | <i>Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Macbeth</i>                     |
| 5. Plays Unpleasant        | <i>Troilus, All's Well, Measure for Measure, Timon</i>                   |
| 6. "Sad, High and Working" | <i>Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Henry VIII</i>                      |
| 7. "Music at the Close"    | The four Romances  |

Explaining her approach, Margaret Webster says : " Our business is not disintegration, but integrity. For the scholars' 'true texts' we are grateful indeed; but it is still our business to transmute them into terms of the living theatre today".<sup>17</sup> Hers is both a practical and a feminine approach, and she makes shrewd comments, especially on some of Shakespeare's heroines. Her seven-period division, however, cannot command acceptance. The early and the last plays are unaffected; it is the middle plays that cause all the confusion. Her grouping of the plays traditionally assigned to the third period under three sub-groups is even less helpful than Ivor Brown's grouping under 'Bitter

<sup>16</sup> *Shakespeare's World of Images* (1949), p. 362.

<sup>17</sup> *Shakespeare Today*, p. 29.

Comedy' and 'The Dark Vision' or Stauffer's grouping under Unweeded Garden, Dark Tower, and Roads to Freedom. Besides, she too jumbles chronology to suit her classification, and, in short, her 'seven periods' cannot stand much scrutiny.

## VI

## A 'FIVE-PERIOD' CLASSIFICATION

The hard core of the problem is really the 'dark comedies', or the 'problem plays' ('bitter comedies' and 'plays unpleasant' are other variations) as they are also often called. These three plays—*Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*—will neither go with the comedies nor with the mature tragedies. To call *Troilus* a comedy, whether of the bright or the dark variety, is to do violence to language. But both *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* do have a 'happy' ending, however much we may dislike the way it is brought about. Realism and romance, smuttiness and poetry, the trivial and the heroic, seem to mix in these plays in odd proportions without quite fusing into unfissionable compounds. It was, of course, Frederick Boas who first coined the title 'problem plays' in his *Shakspeare and His Predecessors* (1896), and he included *Hamlet* also in the group. Ibsen's 'problem plays'—*A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck* and the rest—and plays written under the shadow of Ibsen like A. W. Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* had given currency to the notion of drama setting serious problems to theatre-goers, stinging them to think. Boas felt intrigued by *Troilus*, *Hamlet*, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*—they seemed to defy classification under the accepted categories—and so he wrote:

"Dramas so singular in theme and temper cannot be strictly called comedies or tragedies. We may therefore borrow a convenient phrase from the theatre of today and class them together as Shakspeare's problem-plays".<sup>18</sup>

Shaw who found pleasure in maintaining that Shakespeare was no thinker nevertheless conceded that "in such unpopular plays as

<sup>18</sup> *Shakspeare and His Predecessors*, p. 345.

*All's Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, we find him (Shakespeare) ready and willing to start at the twentieth century if the seventeenth would only let him".<sup>19</sup> In fact, we can go back, if we like, to Euripides himself, in whom critics have found a "modern" element lacking in his elder contemporaries, Sophocles and Aeschylus. In his *Romance and Tragedy* (1922), P. H. Fryc says :

"Euripides is not very unlike Ibsen. Like the latter he too is unmistakably decadent and obsessed by the nightmare of ugliness... the heroic has ceased to exist; ... for the tragic emotion of horror he substitutes disgust; for the moral qualm of his predecessors a shrinking of the flesh, a sense of physical repugnance and nausea".

The preeminence of an Aeschylus or a Milton admitted, we still feel specially drawn to an Euripides or a Donne on account of their "modernity" — the vivid play of a disturbing contemporaneous consciousness in their work. So too critics have been ready to read in Shakespeare's problem plays an element of provoking modernity — a sense of scalding urgency — not present in his great tragedies or romantic comedies.

And yet to give a name is not the same thing as achieving a full explanation or understanding. Critics continue to feel baffled in the presence of these plays. Other titles have been suggested, 'bitter comedies', 'dark comedies', 'cynical comedies', 'pseudo-comedies', 'ambivalent comedies', in the desperate attempt to describe these plays that are neither pure comedies nor pure tragedies but a mingling, perhaps even a muddling together, of the two classical modes. In 1931, W. W. Lawrence made a study of the plays (excluding *Hamlet*) in his *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*; and E. M. W. Tillyard, in his *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (1950), went back to Boas and classed *Hamlet* along with the other three.<sup>20</sup> Although Tillyard admitted that *Hamlet* contained "tragedy of sorts", he nevertheless asserted that it was "a tragedy only in a limited sense". We have seen how Stauffer groups *Julius Caesar* with *Troilus*, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* under 'The Unweeded Garden',

<sup>19</sup> Preface to *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898), p. ix.

<sup>20</sup> Reviewing the book in the *Aryan Path* (August 1950), I dismissed Dr. Tillyard's inclusion of *Hamlet* in the group as untenable. I now feel that I had been too hasty in my judgement.

while Margaret Webster substitutes *Timon* for *Julius Caesar* in her list of the 'Plays Unpleasant'. In his recent book, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (1963), Ernest Schanzer has tried to re-define the term so as to include within its purview only *Julius Caesar*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Thus, at one time or another, this ambiguous group has included *Measure for Measure* (the common factor), *All's Well*, *Troilus*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Timon of Athens*. Vienna, Paris and Florence, Troy and its environs, Elsinore, Alexandria and Rome, Athens and its environs — almost a global coverage! We shall, perhaps, reach intelligibility best if we viewed *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, and the other three 'problem' plays (*Troilus*, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*), as a distinctive group in the canon, occupying a central place between the mature histories and comedies that preceded it and the great tragedies that followed. I would like therefore to suggest a division into five periods as follows:

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Experimental,<br>(1588-1595)   | <i>Errors</i> , <i>Titus</i> , 1, 2 & 3 <i>Henry VI</i> ,<br><i>The Shrew</i> , <i>Verona</i> , <i>R &amp; J</i> , <i>King John</i> , <i>LLL</i> , <i>A Dream</i> , <i>Venus</i> ,<br><i>Lucrece</i> , <i>Early Sonnets</i>  |
| 2. Terrestrial,<br>(1595-1600)    | <i>Richard II</i> , 1 & 2 <i>Henry IV</i> ,<br><i>Henry V</i> , <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> , <i>Much Ado</i> , <i>AYL</i> ,<br><i>Twelfth Night</i> , <i>Merry Wives</i> ,<br><i>Later Sonnets</i> , <i>Julius Caesar</i> |
| 3. Existential,<br>(1600-1604)    | <i>Hamlet</i> , <i>Troilus</i> , <i>All's Well</i> , <i>Measure for Measure</i>  |
| 4. Sacrificial,<br>(1604-1608)    | <i>Othello</i> , <i>King Lear</i> , <i>Macbeth</i> , <i>Timon of Athens</i> , <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> ,<br><i>Coriolanus</i>   |
| 5. Transcendental,<br>(1608-1613) | <i>Pericles</i> , <i>Cymbeline</i> , <i>The Winter's Tale</i> , <i>The Tempest</i> , <i>Henry VIII</i>   |

## VII

## 'FROM HERE TO ETERNITY'

In the division suggested in the previous Section, 'Experimental' is but a variation of Dowden's 'In the Workshop'. Shakespeare is experimenting, finding his way, learning to write. He is for all waters — farce, comedy, history, Senecan melodrama, romantic tragedy, narrative poetry. He seems to be saying, like Hamlet (II. ii. 425) :

We'll e'en to't like French falconers, fly at anything we see.

No two plays of this period are quite alike (not even the 3 Parts of *Henry VI*), but all show vitality, excitement, and the sheer exuberance of youth. Shakespeare feels strongly, speaks forcibly, and is not above showing off. He is young enough to feel that he knows all the questions, and all the answers too. But the main question, for Shakespeare himself, is simply 'How to write?' And only by writing can he learn how to write. Hence the copious output of the early years, since it is not unlikely that a good deal of what he wrote (including, perhaps, an earlier version of *Hamlet*) is now lost to us. At the end of the period, Shakespeare has mastered the art of dramatic writing, and he could already write *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard III* and *Romeo and Juliet*, besides also poems with the power, passion and gorgeousness that characterise *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. 'How to write' is no more a problem to Shakespeare.

'Terrestrial', again, is merely a variation of the Dowdenian 'In the World'. Man in relation to man, and man in relation to collective man (society, the body politic), are Shakespeare's particular preoccupations now, and these are dramatised vividly in the comedies and the histories. In one sense, no doubt, there is but a heightening of tone in these plays compared to the prevailing tone of the earlier plays. From his 'art' (his mastery of the medium now practically taken for granted), Shakespeare is able to shift the emphasis to the characters, their animated dance of striving, their agitated absurd gyrations. "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" was Puck's comment in *A Dream* (III. ii. 115) ; but Shakespeare now almost feels that criminals

too are but fools after a fashion, and so are the fools. In the histories, the theme is unbridled ambition leading to the lunacy of war; in the comedies, the theme is love consummating in the bliss of marriage. There are other chords too, but these — ambition and love — constitute the deep bass, these are the notes that reverberate through all space and time. The lovers generally love at first sight, the Kings and Barons are ready to fight at a moment's notice. Action poses no problems for them; only they cannot control the consequences of their actions. The major characters in these plays are hardly ever troubled by hesitations; whether it is a propensity to ambition or to love, these men and women are as it were born with that vicious or auspicious mole of Nature in them. The question Shakespeare poses in these plays is 'How to live?' There is the way of ambition — false, unbridled ambition — pursued by a Bolingbroke, a Hotspur; this way only leads to strife, war, massacre, general misery. There is the way of love — it is Portia's way, and Rosalind's way. This way leads to generosity, self-giving, marriage, happiness. To win the battle of life is to be ready to give, not always be eager to grasp; and whereas ambition, the lust for power and the craving for revenge release forces of destruction, great love has precisely the opposite effect. Power corrupts, and even the mere seeking of power starts the corrupting and rotting process. But love is an absolute good; its quality is not strained, it blesteth the giver and the taker, for the taker is also the giver.

Already, in *Julius Caesar*, one of the very last plays of the second period, Brutus is troubled by the question whether or not he should kill his friend and benefactor, Caesar. Brutus is no John, or Warwick, or Richard Crookback, or Bolingbroke, or Hotspur; Brutus has a conscience, and Hamlet might perhaps speak both for himself and for Brutus (III. i. 83):

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pitch and moment,  
With this regard, their currents turn awry  
And lose the name of action.

Brutus himself experiences *within* something of an insurrection (II. i. 69), not because he is afraid of action, but rather because he cannot fully convince himself that the contemplated action is



altogether right. In all the five problem plays the question, the overwhelming question, is 'How to act?' — the very pith of the 'existential' problem. To act blindly, almost involuntarily, — to act from what Lionel Trilling calls (in connection with Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*) moral inertia, — to act not from reason or choice but habit, or a physiological necessity, is not to act as a rational self-respecting individual, but as a hedgehog does, as a horse does, or a panther does. Brutus is faced with the choice : to kill or not to kill his friend and benefactor ; Hamlet with the more fundamental choice : 'to be or not to be' ; Helena with the choice : to love and play the 'unwomanly woman' or to suffer in silence ; and Isabella with the choice : to save her brother (paying the price demanded) or not to save him.

For Troilus, it is easier to forget the war in the frenzy of his love for Cressida than to forget Cressida by joining the fray. After Cressida's betrayal, Troilus is dazed, and recovering presently he becomes for the nonce introspective and philosophical. Something that is utterly sacred and ought to be beyond damage has somehow suffered violation and change. Truth has allowed a lie to erode it. The primordial unity and harmony are of a sudden destroyed. Why fight on ? What's the use ? What's the meaning of it all ?

Hamlet's "To be, or not to be — that is the question" is a sort of algebraic expression capable of varied particularity in the divers contexts of the problem plays. Action is demanded, but decision is not easy. Reason, conscience, ethics, philosophy come breaking in. There are undercurrents of uncertainty. Hamlet has no doubt made the promise (on oath too !) to the Ghost that he will kill Claudius but spare the Queen ; but an insurrection rages furiously within, and the existential dialectic goes on. Isabella has declared, "More than our brother is our chastity" (I. iv. 185) ; but there is clearly a storm brewing within, — and it rages all the more furiously when Claudio's abject behaviour provokes from her the cruel words, " 'Tis best that thou diest quickly " (III. i. 152), — for the moment the disguised Duke proposes a way out of her predicament, she clutches at it as a drowning man will clutch at a straw. Helena *would* have Bertram, if only she could ; but she makes no positive move till the King's illness gives her the opportunity either to gain all or to lose all (her own life included). After the churlish rejection

by her husband, it is his letter that offers her a clue to her ultimate rehabilitation. She is the 'unwomanly' woman, but even she has known how to wait, how to take her defeat, how out of the nettle defeat to pluck the flower, success. Troilus, when we meet him in the play, is unripe yet; he acts according to the habits of his class — he would possess the woman he loves, he would destroy the man he hates. The rule of reason — the categorical imperative of conscience — the force of a seasoned and purposive will — are not seen in him; not yet. He veers between love and war, self-indulgence and blind destruction; but even so there is in the later disillusioned Troilus the glint of the raw youth who has emerged from the chrysalis stage to responsible adulthood. In these four plays, it may almost be said that we are less interested in the denouement, the catastrophe, than in the mental processes, the spiritual struggles, preceding the crucial act (or the failure to act) — in other words, in the hero or heroine in the grip of the existential dilemma. They must needs fight their own inner battles before they can face the enemy without. The pressure is from without, but the battle is fought — and won or lost — within.

In the tragedies, on the other hand, the shift in emphasis is again decisive. What finally appals us — overwhelms us — is the magnitude of the suffering, the sacrificial 'holocaust'. Othello intends the killing of Desdemona to be a "sacrifice". Lear tells his daughter (V. iii. 20):

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,  
The gods themselves throw incense.

That Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are punished 'properly' in the end is a minor matter: what is of capital importance is the fact that their failure and their misery stem from their own actions. It may almost be said that they career towards the abyss with eyes open. Macbeth knows exactly what he is doing, and what he can expect. Nothing less than damnation in the "life to come"; but even should he shut that out of his mind for the nonce, even *here*, — "upon this bank and shoal of time", — no mercy is to be expected (I. vii. 7):

But in these cases  
We still have judgement here, that we but teach

Bloody instructions, which being taught return  
To plague th' inventor.

Like the moth being irresistibly drawn to the flame, these tragic heroes and heroines go their fated way and participate in the final incredible holocaust. At least they know how to die. Having made a mess of their lives, — blindly, purblindly, — being defeated in their endeavour to learn and practise the answer to the question 'How to live?', they can only school themselves 'How to die'. Desdemona dies a painful — but also a beautiful — death. Othello dies a brave death, as befits the whole tenour of his life. Lear dies — a King yet, aye, every inch a King. Antony dies as an antique Roman, Cleopatra dies a regal Queen — to Octavius' discomfiture. We are beyond the realm of good and evil, of crime and punishment; we feel that these events have, less a terrestrial, and more a cosmic, significance. We are at the threshold of the mystery when death is terrible and glorious, when such sacrificial death is in some strange inexplicable way related to the central truth of existence.

After such 'sacrificial' plays, after witnessing Shiva's frenzied Dance of Death, the only real sequel that we could apprehend should be on a transcendental plane. Hence the plays of the last period. 'How to die, yet transcend death?' Between the catastrophe and the renewal, between the sterility of winter and the new bloom of spring, a miracle intervenes; it is not the less a miracle because we perennially witness it! The crimes of Leontes and the sorrows of Hermione cannot be annulled; they can only be transcended. Pericles, Cymbeline, Leontes, Prospero, — with them too the past is beyond recall. The crimes, the follies, the misunderstandings, the sufferings are over. Pardon is the word to all. The future is for a new generation that had no responsibility for the budget of past errors and miseries. The shadows recede, the Sun rises again. Death loses its edge, darkness its terrors; in the miracle of transcendence there is effected at last the mystic leap from Here to Eternity.

In the rather sketchy review attempted in the preceding paragraphs, Shakespeare's development as a dramatist is viewed as a series of dialectical victories, the progression of poetic drama doing duty (among other things) for the mastery of height after height of possibility: How to write? How (through writing) to achieve self-expression? How to live? How to make drama

both the answer, and the translation of the answer into life? How in a crisis of conscience to act? How to face the insurrection within before taking arms against the enemy without? How, when life is not possible anymore, to learn to die? And how to die, and yet transcend death? Here is a progression from the visible plains to the ultimate (invisible snow-capped) heights, — from Here to Eternity. Stated thus, of course, it is an oversimplification of Shakespeare's strivings, scalings and conquests spread over 25 years. The living of each day — each hour, each second — is a trial, capped by failure or success; yet one's whole life has a meaning too, a rounded finish, perhaps, or only a dismal incompleteness. The writing of each play — each scene, each line of poetry — is a trial too, and one succeeds or fails; yet the dramatist's life-work as a whole may have a meaning also. In the terrestrial world, while we see the rocks, fields, streams, sandy tracts, the houses, streets, playgrounds, market-places, beneath them all is the underground river and above them all is the revolving Sun. A rare dramatic genius and poet like Shakespeare has to be viewed in the mass, and also in the minutiae; the design holds together the details, the details fill and enrich the design. The *sruti* like the deep bass sustains the song, while the variegated notes enrich the *sruti*. In T. S. Eliot's words,

"The genuine poetic drama must, at its best, observe all the regulations of the plain drama, but will weave them *organically* . . . into a much richer design. But our first duty as either critics or 'interpreters', surely, must be to try to grasp the whole design, and read *character* and *plot* in the understanding of this subterrene or submarine music. . . . The work of Shakespeare is like life itself something to be lived through. If we lived it completely we should need no interpretation; but on our plane of appearances our interpretations themselves are a part of our living".<sup>21</sup>

For Shakespeare himself, writing was a part of his living, a means to the mastery of the art of living; so it could be, on a humbler level, with the critics as well.

<sup>21</sup> Introduction to G. Wilson Knight's *The Wheel of Fire* (1930), pp. xviii-xix.

## CHAPTER IV

### SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND

#### I

#### EXPANDING HORIZONS

"To comprehend what Shakespeare wrote", says G. B. Harrison, "his plays must be seen against the national background".<sup>1</sup> While this is true enough, the vital qualification which F. P. Wilson makes is also called for:

"While we strive to make ourselves Shakespeare's contemporaries, it is even more important to make Shakespeare our contemporary, to keep him level with life and with our lives".<sup>2</sup>

We have to transport ourselves to Shakespeare's age, but we shouldn't become mere antiquarians in the result. We become Elizabethans with an effort of the will and the imagination so that we may see how what was merely Elizabethan in Shakespeare was but the lesser (if not the separable) part of him: what made him the greatest dramatic poet of his time and all time was his capacity to speak to his contemporaries as also to the succeeding generations. Literature is born in time, in a particular milieu, but unless it has the potency to transcend these, it must in the end fail as literature, and dwindle into a document. What distinguished Shakespeare from his numerous fellow-dramatists (even the most eminent among them, a Marlowe, a Jonson, a Webster) was precisely this capacity to be a universalist though in the garb of an Elizabethan, to be a poet gifted with the vision to look into the innermost truth of things and not just a popular dramatist exploiting topicality or offering entertainment. As St. Clare Byrne puts it,

<sup>1</sup> *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> British Academy Lecture, 1941.

"We are right to feel that he beyond all his fellows escaped more completely from that pressure of immediacy and the contemporaneous that mutes the poetry, constricts the heart, chills the blood and trammels the flight of the imaginative artist—driving him either into the circumscription and delimitation of 'realism', or else into the realms of fantastic 'escape'." <sup>3</sup>

It is unlikely Shakespeare was ever out of England,—though biographers have enterprisingly tried to send him on seaborne expeditions, on Italian tours, and on Continental campaigns. Modern writers—a Maugham, a Hemingway, a Graham Greene—seek 'copy' in continent after continent: but Shakespeare had no such opportunities, no such need even. He knew his Stratford well, he knew his London well; he also knew the provinces, since he must have occasionally at least accompanied his Company on their travels. He knew the value of reading, and he read extensively both for pleasure and for picking up thoughts or plots for his plays. As Hardin Craig writes,

"Shakespeare's learning is not of a formal cast; it may nevertheless be described as superior. His grasp of the essence of Renaissance learned culture is nothing short of grand". <sup>4</sup>

With a mind so well-stocked, Shakespeare was also ready to assimilate ideas and impressions from his conversations with his fellow-dramatists and fellow-actors as also travellers rich in experience. For the rest, he used his imagination, without however giving the quietus to his sense of fact or his wide-awake commonsense. His Italy is like Italy only superficially, and is really England in fact; and his Vienna is more London than Vienna. Writing of 'London and the Life of the Town', Henry B. Wheatley says:

"The suburbs of a walled city have always had a bad name. This was so in London, and the scenes of *Measure for Measure*, which are placed in Vienna, suggest the vicious surroundings of the English capital". <sup>5</sup>

He stuck largely to what he knew—what he had read about—what he had observed; when the circle of his acquaintances grew wider, when his experience gained in depth, his plays benefited

<sup>3</sup> *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> *The Enchanted Glass* (1950), p. 261.

<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare's England* (1916), Vol. II, p. 178.

too. And always he knew that it would be safe to look into his heart and write, and to rely on his disciplined imagination for the exploration of probabilities.

On the other hand, Shakespeare was an Elizabethan. He wrote in no self-wrought vacuum. Nor had he the easy modern ways of participating in the commerce of ideas. "Shakespeare's England", says Harrison, "far from being spacious, was in many ways narrowly confined, and not least in the means of exchanging ideas".<sup>6</sup> Still, compared to the middle ages, conditions were changing. In 1476 — 88 years before Shakespeare's birth — Caxton set up the first printing press at Westminster. Grocyn, Lily and Linacre brought from Italy to England a new interest in classical studies. In 1499 Erasmus paid his first visit to Oxford, and later took up his residence in Cambridge. The Renaissance came to England, a little belated perhaps, but come it did. Colet, who had earlier electrified Oxford by his lectures on St. Paul's Epistles, founded St. Paul's School in 1509. More's *Utopia* (1516) was a cultural event of some significance. Twenty-two years later, the Bible in English, based on Tyndale's and also Coverdale's, came into general currency. There were, besides, the educationists with a sense of mission, Elyot, Cheke, Thomas Wilson and Roger Ascham. Simultaneously, there was a spate of translations in English — Ovid, Plutarch, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Virgil, Montaigne, Froissart, du Bartas, Ariosto, Aristotle, Homer himself.

It was verily an age of expanding horizons. The discovery — partly by design, partly by accident — of the ocean routes to the East and, more important still, the discovery of the New World, made England's situation central between the Old World and the New, whereas it had hitherto been considered merely peripheral to the known world. Mariners like Columbus, Cortes, Vasco de Gama, Vespucci and Megallen made history, and the Cabots, father and son, sailing from Bristol, made a passage to Labrador, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Navigation was facilitated by the Mariner's Compass and Mercator's Chart, and there was thus a new stimulus to adventure. Following Megallen's example, Drake circumnavigated the world in 1578-80, and 8 years later made his spectacular and audacious raid on Cadiz. In the same

<sup>6</sup> *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, p. 164.

year, Raleigh — adventurer, explorer, writer, historian — sent his colonists to Virginia. England — even insular England — was obscurely breaking the bonds of geography and history, and marching into the future. There was a thrill of excitement and expectancy, and Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589) made a prose epic out of the travels and exploits of the Elizabethan seamen and adventurers.

In politics the situation was charged with both danger and endless possibility. Mediaeval feudalism was slowly giving place to modern nationalism. The horrors of the Wars of the Roses were over; those of the Civil War and the Revolution were yet to come. Between the civil wars of the 15th and the 17th centuries, 16th century England enjoyed peace and prosperity after a fashion. After Bosworth (1485), the Tudor dynasty had established a despotism, on the whole with the people's approval, but also causing occasional irritations and murmurs of discontent. Eight years after the second Tudor, Henry VIII, became King, Martin Luther revolted against the Catholic Church at Wittenberg. Henry, the *Fidei Defensor* of 1521, slowly turned against Rome, partly for personal and partly for national reasons, and so an intestine struggle began in England. In 1531, Henry was acknowledged by Convocation as the Head of the Church as well. Four years later, Sir Thomas More and Cardinal Fisher were executed. Even in spite of his monumental egotism and his undisguised despotic ways, Henry tried within limits to avoid the extremes of Catholicism and Protestantism. But during the reigns of his two immediate successors, his son Edward and his daughter Mary, there was a violent lurch, first to one side and then to the other. Queen Mary married Philip of Spain and tried during her all too brief reign to make England Catholic again. Latimer, Ridley, and Cranmer were among the martyrs of her reign, as More and Fisher had been of her father's. Religious passions were roused as never before. When Elizabeth became Queen in 1558, she promptly reversed the trend and went back to her father's compromise. In 1563, the 39 Articles of the Church of England were adopted by Convocation, and she left the extremists of either side (the Catholics and the Puritans) more or less alone except when they became politically dangerous as well. Although it was but a makeshift compromise, it must



have come as a relief to the vast majority of her subjects. "The yoke of Rome was shaken off", writes Ronald Bayne, "and the yoke of Geneva not yet bound on. Between the two dominions came the Age of Elizabeth — the age of the layman uncontrolled either by priest or presbyter".<sup>7</sup> This collision of the Reformation with the Renaissance in England and the changes during 4 successive reigns "tended generally to eliminate the best parish priests, and to lower the standard both of piety and learning among those that were left".<sup>8</sup> Hence the reference in Shakespeare's plays to insufficient or ill-educated priests like Sir Nathaniel in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Sir Topas in *Twelfth Night*, Sir Hugh Evans in *Merry Wives* and Sir Oliver Martext in *As You Like It*.

While peace within had been established, relations with Spain proved far from cordial, and a 'cold war' raged between Elizabeth and Philip II. Their men fought in the Netherlands, in Ireland, and on the high seas, — and piracy itself was winked at if it would cause pin-pricks to the enemy. After the execution of Mary Stuart for treason in 1587, matters came to a head, and the cold war warmed up suddenly. The Spanish Armada consisting of 130 ships was sent out by Philip to bring England to submission, but a timely storm, Drake's fire-power, and other adverse circumstances caused terrific devastation, and a battered Armada — hardly the half of what it had been — returned home. England was saved, but there was no peace yet. The cold war had become a hot war, and so it remained for the rest of the Queen's life. Rightly therefore Harrison says that "the background of Elizabethan drama from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (c. 1587) to *Hamlet* (published in 1603) was a great war".<sup>9</sup> The continual see-saw between elation (following news or even the anticipation of military victory) and depression (in the wake of defeat) was reflected in the dramas of the time, and often a play seemed to present an ambivalent attitude, the tension between the romantic-heroic and the cynical-realistic approaches to war. When Hotspur said in *1 Henry IV* (I. iii. 201) —

By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap  
To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon;

<sup>7</sup> *Shakespeare's England*, Vol. I, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, p. 168.

Or dive into the bottom of the deep,  
Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,  
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks —

there were many in the audience to applaud the speech. When Falstaff said in the course of the same play (V. i. 132) —

Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word? Honour. What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon —

there were as many (if not more) to applaud this catechism too. The glories as well as the scars of war were fresh, — the scars, perhaps, more than the glories. Although it is a King speaking here, it is also Shakespeare speaking, putting into words the feelings of the common people:

So shaken as we are, so wan with care,  
Find we a time for frightened peace to pant . . .  
No more the thirsty entrance of this soil  
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood;  
No more shall trenching war channel her fields,  
Nor bruise her flow'rets with the armed hoofs  
of hostile paces.

(*I Henry IV*, I. i. 1)

War was no doubt evil, but civil strife was the worst curse of all, and its spectre was seldom very far from the consciousness of the Elizabethans.

In his home, and in the Stratford of his day, Shakespeare must have had personal knowledge of the religious and political tensions of his time. In London, his knowledge added fresh dimensions; he could seize what he saw, he could juxtapose seeming contradictions, and he could also transcend the contradictions by force of his inner vision. He portrayed no doubt what he had read about or seen for himself, but since he always saw the universal behind the particular, the timeless beyond the contemporaneous, his portraits of religious bigotry, political chicanery, recruiting vagaries, and heroic attitudinisations strike us still as astonishingly 'modern'. When Marcellus asks Horatio (*Hamlet*, I. i. 71) —

Why this same strict and most observant watch  
 So nightly toils the subject of the land ;  
 And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,  
 And foreign mart for implements of war ;  
 Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task  
 Does not divide the Sunday from the week ;  
 What might be toward, that this sweaty haste  
 Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day —

Shakespeare's contemporaries should have compared notes (for in Elizabethan England there was often witnessed the stir and rattle of such preparation for war), and we too can read in the passage a distant projection of the 'emergency' caused by the invasion of India by China in October-November 1962.

What critics have called Shakespeare's defects — the inconsistencies, the inaccuracies, the anachronisms — are also the virtues (however unconsciously cultivated) that release the plays from the prison-house of constricted locality and contemporaneity. We are not looking in a Shakespeare play for a documentary about an Elizabethan castle or manor, a faithful picture of Rome, or Venice, or Alexandria. There are the names, the draperies, the outer circumstances ; but the heart of the matter is the human predicament poised between an indifferent or positively antagonistic outer world and an inner world seething with passion, and emotion, thoughts, feelings, and instincts, and *this* has suffered little change through the ages. From Venice or Vienna, Troy or Alexandria, we are repeatedly flown back to Shakespeare's London, and from there to where we are today is no less easy or permissible a translation. Of St. Paul's in Shakespeare's time, M. M. Reese writes :

" St. Paul's was socially as well as spiritually the hub of London life. Its spire rose above the spires and steeples of a hundred and twenty other churches in the City and its environs, and in its central aisle, known familiarly to Londoners as ' Paul's Walk ', the visitor could find ' the land's epitome... the whole world's map '. It was at once mart and thoroughfare and club ".<sup>10</sup>

Shakespeare could meet almost everybody in Paul's Walk, as (to a lesser extent though) we could today at Piccadilly Circus. (In New Delhi, it would be Connaught Place ; in Madras, perhaps

<sup>10</sup> *Shakespeare : His World and His Work*, p. 102.

Luz.) Likely enough, what is striking about the present-day Englishman — his taciturnity, his habit of understatement, his capacity to keep his emotions well under control, his tendency to take orderliness ('Q'ing, for example) for granted — was not the distinguishing quality of the Elizabethan Englishman. "The Elizabethans", says Reese, "were less inhibited than we are; they lived closer to Nature and their emotions were nearer to the surface, emerging more freely in utterances of horror and delight".<sup>11</sup> Occurrences not quite uncommon in India today — mob-frenzy, goonda-raj, the burning of buses, slogan-shouting, hartals, the burning of effigies, the imprisoning of an unpopular Vice-Chancellor in his chambers — had their Elizabethan counterparts, and people just took them (they had to) in their stride. Vagabonds roamed about, and were a menace to peaceful citizens. Serving-men out of employment, demobilised soldiers, country labourers who had lost their occupation, as also waifs and wastrels, swelled the ranks of these reckless or improvident men. "Varying in skill and livery", says Charles Whibley, "they had a common purpose — to live without work, and a common end — the gallows".<sup>12</sup> No wonder crime was rampant in the streets, and the watchmen and constables, serjeants and catchpoles — men not very different from Dogberry and Verges in *Much Ado* — "were quite incompetent to deal with the criminals".<sup>13</sup> The splendour of the great houses, the sumptuous apparel, the dainty fare laid out on the tables, the pages flitting to and fro, the music, the gardens, the gallant lords and the gracious ladies, these were one part of the picture; the other part was made up of squalor, poverty, disease, violence, and crime. "There were fierce contrasts in Elizabethan life, as in Elizabethan drama", says Walter Raleigh; "Life was less private than it is today, and the extremes of wealth and poverty were more in evidence".<sup>14</sup> Even so, the age was conscious that it was trying to transcend the chaos and superstition of the Middle Ages, exchanging the ideal of the fighter for that of the gentleman; and, as John Buxton points out (*Elizabethan Taste*, 1963), decorum and not exuberance was

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>12</sup> *Shakespeare's England*, Vol. II, p. 495.

<sup>13</sup> Henry B. Wheatley in *Shakespeare's England*, Vol. II, p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> *Shakespeare's England*, Vol. I, p. 19.

"the principle by which the rational order of the world was represented in works of art".

During the last decade or two of Elizabeth's reign, thinking people as well as the mass of her subjects began to worry about the problem of 'succession'. Just as in India today we often ask, "After Nehru, who?" In her younger days, of course, "Elizabeth's court was no less crowded with suitors than Portia's Belmont. From all ends of the earth they came trooping or sent their likely ambassadors of love before them".<sup>15</sup> But this Portia had *not* married; on the other hand, she had declared that her husband was the Kingdom of England, and that her children were the people of England. Although public appeals had henceforth ceased, people continued to ask in private "After Elizabeth, who?" Would there be a civil war again? God forbid that such a disaster should overwhelm them again. Their forefathers had gone through the Wars of the Roses, and they wanted no re-enactment of that national tragedy.

The anxieties notwithstanding, life on the surface was gay and full enough. It was an age of change, and people seemed on the whole to welcome the changes, but they didn't quite know how far the new currents would take them along. There was no complete break with the past, but the pace of the change made at least the timider sort cast wistful glances at a past that was yielding ground too fast. This new accent on national glory was good, of course, but thinking people couldn't help being anxious about the outcome of it all. The old nobility felt uneasy, the common people were feeling both excited and bewildered. The peaceful transition from Elizabeth's to James's reign by no means vastly improved matters. If peace with Spain was restored at last, the economic condition greatly deteriorated. The movement of population, the expanding overseas trade, and the expansion of credit benefited the few who became richer at the expense of the mass of the people who found their old occupations taken away from them. "The new capitalism was in silent conflict with traditional forms".<sup>16</sup> Shakespeare evidently felt out of tune with the new age, and that was partly the reason perhaps why he wrote a morbid tragedy like *Timon* or effected a sort of 'escape'

<sup>15</sup> E. K. Chambers, in *Shakespeare's England*, Vol. I, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> Reese, *Shakespeare*, p. 111.

from the contemporary scene to the world of the Romances of the last period. When he first came to London, the city's population was of the order of 200,000 — England's population itself being hardly more than five millions. The city then overflowed into the country on either side, and Thames was a familiar and even a friendly river, like rivers near many Indian cities today. The solitary Bridge across the river and the Tower of London were star-spots, and people were properly proud of them both. The Tower housed, says E. K. Chambers, "traitors, and a collection of caged beasts, including an old lion called Edward the Sixth, a tiger, a lynx, a wolf, a fretful porcupine, and an eagle".<sup>17</sup> London, besides, was a city of churches and taverns, and there were the Inns of Court, and there was the Court itself. Taverns were hardly safer places than obscure street-corners, for Marlowe was killed in the course of a tavern brawl, and once Shakespeare himself was charged with assault. Duelling was illegal, yet duelling went on, and Ben Jonson killed his opponent in a duel. The very rich and the very poor both sought pastimes and pleasures befitting their respective 'stations', often crossing the Thames by bridge or boat for an evening's outing in Southwark. But *all* were able to meet in one of the playhouses and enjoy the best Elizabethan dramas. When the plague raged in London between 1592 and 1594, when Londoners lived for years in the immediacy of death, of treason and public execution, of invasion and possible conquest, Shakespeare could still make his dramas a noble gesture of defiance, he could make death itself glorious and beautiful. In John Masfield's words,

"Tragedy to the Elizabethan was the terrible fall of greatness to which the heads on the gales bore witness. All who saw these plays had seen heads fall. Tragedy to them was a looking at Fate for a lesson in deportment on life's scaffold; that if they could not, like the swan, die singing, they could in their hearts exult that in death they won eternal victory".<sup>18</sup>

But when many die (as during the plague or as the result of what we should call today 'totalitarian' tyranny), there is nothing serious in such mortality. Even so, Shakespeare could make

<sup>17</sup> *Shakespeare's England*, Vol. I, p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> *William Shakespeare* (1954), pp. 129-30.

memorable poetry about the pathos of the human situation. It is Ross speaking in *Macbeth* (IV. iii. 164) :

Alas, poor country,  
Almost afraid to know itself ! It cannot  
Be call'd our mother, but our grave ; where nothing,  
But who knows nothing, is once seen to smile ;  
Where sighs, and groans, and shrieks, that rent the air,  
Are made, not mark'd ; where violent sorrow seems  
A modern ecstasy ; the dead man's knell  
Is there scarce ask'd for who ; and good men's lives  
Expire before the flowers in their caps,  
Dying or ere they sicken.

Shakespeare had doubtless heard of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and of Alva's tyrannical regime in the Netherlands, and so he made Scotland under Macbeth the image of all devilish political oppression. Yet mere cupidity, the endemic plague of economic exploitation and strangulation, the endless hucksterings of the market-place and the law-court, sickened and disgusted him. It was too mean for tragedy, too serious for comedy. Was this the reason why Shakespeare took his audiences to the old England of Cymbeline's days, to distant Bohemia (which was also *rural* England), or to the airs and streams of Prospero's Island ? He was not quite at home in Jacobean England or in the Jacobean theatre, and so — after indulging in a dream of the future in *Henry VIII* (V. v. 52) about "new nations" — he retired from the theatre itself, and returned to Stratford.

## II

### MEDIAEVAL AND MODERN

Just as London was visibly bursting its bonds in Shakespeare's time, the invisible continent of human 'thought' too was being subjected to stresses from within and pressures from without. The received mediaeval sense of 'order' which comprehended the entire universe was still the popular orthodoxy, but its nucleus was being bombarded by charged particles of the new thought. The Elizabethans, according to E. M. W. Tillyard, had a conception of cosmology or world-order that was essentially mediaeval "although it had discarded much mediaeval detail. The universe

was a unity, in which everything had its place, and it was the perfect work of God. Any imperfection was the work not of God but of man; for with the fall of man the universe underwent a sympathetic corruption".<sup>19</sup> This 'order' was of a triune character, comprising a chain, a series of corresponding planes, and a dance. The chain, which had to be viewed vertically, ranged from the lowest creatures to the Divine, passing on the way Man, Collective Man (or the Commonwealth, or the 'State'), the Universe, and the 3 angelic orders, and their sub-varieties, viz., angels, archangels, principalities, powers, virtues, dominations, thrones, cherubs and seraphs. "Every speck of creation was a link in the chain... there could be no gap".<sup>20</sup> The 'planes' were horizontal, "a number of planes, arranged one below another in order of dignity but connected by an immense net of correspondences".<sup>21</sup> How was man the 'microcosm' connected with the 'macrocosm', the body politic (or Commonwealth)? "On the one hand they made it express the idea of that order they longed for and on the other serve as a fixed pattern before which the fierce variety of real life could be transacted and to which it could be referred".<sup>22</sup> Finally, the universe was viewed as no dead or static thing, but as a living harmony — "a state of music... one perpetual dance".<sup>23</sup> This comprehensive view of cosmology is given resounding poetic recordation in Ulysses' speech before the assembled Greek chieftains in *Troilus and Cressida* (I. iii. 83) :

Degree heing vizarded,  
Th' unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.  
The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre,  
Observe degree, priority, and place,  
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,  
Office, and custom, in all line of order;  
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol  
In noble eminence enthron'd and sph'ring

<sup>19</sup> *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Peregrine Book), p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> *The Elizabethan World Picture*, p. 23. See also *The Frame of Order : An Outline of Elizabethan Belief* taken from Treatises of the late Sixteenth Century (1957), in which the editor, James Winny, has presented the material in three Parts : MAN ; THE STATE ; and THE UNIVERSE.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 94.



Amidst the other, whose med'cinable eye  
 Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,  
 And posts, like the commandment of a king,  
 Sans check, to good and bad. But when the planets  
 In evil mixture to disorder wander,  
 What plagues and what portents, what mutiny,  
 What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,  
 Commotion in the winds ! Frighis, changes, horrors,  
 Divert and crack, rend and deracinate,  
 The unity and married calm of states  
 Quite from their fixture ! O, when degree is shak'd,  
 Which is the ladder of all high designs,  
 The enterprise is sick ! How could communities,  
 Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,  
 Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,  
 The primogenity and due of birth,  
 Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,  
 But by degree, stand in authentic place ?  
 Take but degree away, untune that string,  
 And hark what discord follows ! Each thing melts  
 In mere oppugnancy : the bounded waters  
 Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,  
 And make a sop of all this solid globe ;  
 Strength should be lord of imbecility,  
 And the rude son should strike his father dead ;  
 Force should be right ; or, rather, right and wrong —  
 Between whose endless jar justice resides —  
 Should lose their names, and so should justice too.  
 Then everything includes itself in power,  
 Power into will, will into appetite ;  
 And appetite, an universal wolf,  
 So doubly seconded with will and power,  
 Must make perforce an universal prey,  
 And last eat up himself.

While this remarkable speech has due dramatic relevance in the play in which (and where) it occurs, its length, its richness of imagery, and its strident sense of urgency give it also a key place in the Canon as a whole. It is Ulysses speaking to the Greek chieftains, it is also Shakespeare speaking to his countrymen. "Ulysses' speech", says Wilson Knight, "forms a perfect statement of the case for the moral order against the high mystic philosophy of tragedy and passion"<sup>24</sup> — it is Apollonian dialectic in contrast to Dionysian frenzy. Whether it is Ulysses or Shakes-

<sup>24</sup> *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 55.

peare speaking, the speech is a valid hypothesis based on the facts as generally known in the 16th century and on a study of the Elizabethan social world with its hierarchy of ranks, classes and degrees, which were apparently as rigid as the 'castes' in India even today. The linking up of the heavenly order with order in society and order in the human microcosm was rational enough within the limits imposed by the condition of contemporary 'scientific' knowledge unaided by instruments such as the telescope, microscope, etc.

Let us look at Ulysses' speech a little more closely. He begins by saying that when 'degree' is 'vizarded' (covered) the unworthiest looks like the worthiest: Hector, for example, when wholly masked may look no different from Pandarus. But what is this 'degree'? It is priority, place, proportion, form, office, custom, in all *line of order*. Degree is hierarchical subordination, the very soul of 'order'; it is the old Platonic principle of stability in gradation. Look at the heavens: the stars, the planets, the Sun; they know 'degree', they exemplify 'order'. Of the heavenly bodies, the Sun (Sol) enjoys preeminence and corrects the ill-effects of meteors and other evil planets. For, when such wrong movements occur, they have their immediate repercussions — storms, earthquakes, eclipses, plagues — and "the unity and married calm of states" is disturbed. There is no immunity anywhere; any wrong movement anywhere is transmitted everywhere; it is collective order — or complete disorder.

If 'degree' is the soul of order, it is also the ladder leading to "all high designs". Layer upon layer, rung upon rung, the high designs grow and fulfil themselves, for there are links and correspondences between all the planes of endeavour; without the cooperation of all the elements, civic life, communal life, institutional life, family life, all must suffer, for the well-being of the collectivity is entirely dependent on everything being in its right place and fulfilling the function appropriate to it.

Lastly, 'degree' is also the basis of harmony, the clue to the dance of creative life that world existence is. Just as harmony in music can be destroyed by one false note, order and all high designs and the pure joy of life can all be destroyed by one act of disobedience or wantonness or perversity. Those notes that make the chord of human happiness — filial piety, right action, justice, mercy, restraint — all must grow harsh and cacophonous,

losing their essential nature, and only the all-ravenous lust for power will remain, destroying everything, and at last achieving its own self-destruction as well.

Order, high designs, harmony ; orderly existence, the purposive movement of consciousness, the dance of creative life ; *sat, chit, ananda* ; all depend upon the preservation of 'degree' (what Wordsworth was to call 'duty'). If 'degree' is 'vizarded', order is disrupted, progress halts, and there follow misery and death. Like the demon Bhasmasura of Indian mythology, man driven by the egotistic lust for power destroys all and ultimately destroys himself also.

According to Christian theology, the universe was made for man, and man the microcosm was the epitome of the universe or the macrocosm ; in between came the social order. The three hierarchies had to swim or sink together. And Ulysses' speech, as Theodore Spencer rightly points out, "sums up nearly everything the Elizabethans felt about the matter".<sup>25</sup> And yet this orthodoxy had to face new speculation, audacious questioning, and above all the bombardment of new knowledge posited by intuitive reason and verified by experiment. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) who, according to Whitehead, was "perhaps the man who most completely anticipated both Bacon and the whole modern point of view", symbolised in himself the total meaning and spirit of the Renaissance and was the link between the living past and the unborn future. He was a superlative artist squared with a scientist, and worked by daring intuition rather than systematic reasoning. He too thought that man was a microcosmic image of the universe, yet also potentially a re-shaper, transformer of that of which he was but an infinitesimal part. It was a single harmony,—the harmony within, the harmony without ; to upset one was to endanger the other. But man the transformer could forge new splendours, ascend to heights now undreamt of. This is a dim anticipation of what Sri Aurobindo has stated in our own time :

"The animal is satisfied with a modicum of necessity ; the gods are content with their splendours. But man cannot rest permanently until he reaches some highest good. He is the greatest of living beings because he is the most discontented, because he feels most the pressure of limi-

<sup>25</sup> *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (1942), p. 21.

tations. He alone, perhaps, is capable of being seized by the divine frenzy for a remote ideal".<sup>36</sup>

Lost in admiration of Leonardo's marvellous paintings, people could ignore the vast implications of his intuitive thought. But Copernicus (1473-1543) gave a more positive jolt to Renaissance thought. It had been flattering to human vanity to believe with Ptolemy that man on earth was at the centre of the cosmos. But Copernicus declared :

" Whatever motion appears in the firmament arises not from any motion of the firmament, but from the earth's motion. The earth together with its circumjacent elements performs a complete rotation on its fixed poles in a daily motion, while the firmament and the highest heaven abide unchanged ".

Of course he found corroboration for his view in Nicetus, and other ancients. The Sun became the new centre, the visible God, the All-Seer. But this appeared to be repugnant to traditional Christianity. Luther himself denounced Copernican Astronomy as being contrary to scripture. But the real fury of orthodoxy became manifest only when Galileo (who was born in the same year as Shakespeare) demonstrated as true what Copernicus had put forward as a ' hypothesis '.

The attack on the mediaeval system of order and hierarchy came from other directions as well. Instituting a detailed comparison between men and animals in the essay ' Apology for Raimond Sebond ', Montaigne (1533-92) reached the startling conclusion that man's is but a mediocre condition, without any special " prerogative and preeminence ". Leonardo had said that man was potentially the transformer of the universe. But Montaigne suavely deflated man's self-importance and dehumanised him to the level of a beast. Man was not only *not* at the centre of the cosmos ; he was not even the *rational* animal he had imagined himself to be, and he had no claim to any distinctive status in the natural hierarchy. He is nothing, less than nothing by himself, though by surrendering to the will of God he might still redeem himself. " Abandon all *dharmas*, take refuge in *Me* alone ", says the Lord in the *Bhagavad Gita* (XVII, 66). Montaigne's view was that Man " will rise if God extraordinarily lends him a hand. He will rise by abandoning and renouncing his own

<sup>36</sup> *The Life Divine* (1960 Impression), p. 56.

proper means, and by suffering himself to be raised and uplifted by purely celestial means".<sup>27</sup> It is as though Montaigne too exhorted in the words of the *Gita*: "Abandon all *dharma*s, take refuge in God alone".

Attack had also come from Machiavelli (1469-1527). Five years before Luther nailed his theses at the closed door of the Church at Wittenberg, Machiavelli was driven to political exile and spent the last 15 years of his life probing the tangled political situation of his time, and out of these researches emerged a Grammar of Politics, *The Prince*. Machiavelli's concern was, not with man in relation to the circumambient universe, nor man in relation to God; it was rather with the 'body politic', man in relation to Collective Man (the State). The human condition was an imperfect one, and just as poison had to be met by poison, so too force had to be met by force, and fraud by fraud. Princerecraft or statecraft involved acting, sometimes like a fox, and sometimes like a lion. "A prudent ruler ought not to keep faith when by doing it it would be against his interest"! Was Machiavelli being cynical or only practical? Or was there really no difference between the two? In his *Discourses* occurs this notorious political axiom:

"Whoever desires to found a state and give it laws must start with assuming that all men are bad and ever ready to display their vicious nature, whenever they may find occasion for it".<sup>28</sup>

*The Prince*, when it was printed at last in 1532 (having been written a couple of decades earlier), shocked thinking people—but also held them in a sort of fascinated horror. "At the bottom of the mind", says Reese, "there was the nagging suspicion that Machiavelli may have been right, and the power of his fascination is attested by the number of times the career of the 'lawless' politician was explored in Elizabethan drama".<sup>29</sup> And Theodore Spencer says that Machiavelli was referred to "no fewer than 395 times in Elizabethan drama as the embodiment of human villainy".

It has been remarked that drama flourishes best when the spirit of inquiry meets the spirit of poetry and accomplishes a

<sup>27</sup> *Essays* (Translated by E. J. Trenchmann), Vol. II, p. 53.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 469.

fruitful marriage with it. Faith wrangles with doubt, there is the dialectic between the old world that is not yet dead and the new world that is not yet born, there is a tension in the plane of thought, in the sanctuary of the soul; and when a true poet seizes this situation and charges recognisably human characters with these diverse currents of thought and feeling, then indeed enthralling drama is born. In Aeschylus and Sophocles, in Euripides and Aristophanes, — in a progression, as it were, — the certitudes of the old Greek religion met the new questioning spirit erupting from the grim realities of life; the resulting drama was first essentially religious still, presently more and more critical or sceptical, and so there came to be written the tragedies of Euripides and the comedies of Aristophanes. In Shakespeare's time, England was emerging from the theological and ethical absolutes of the Middle Ages. There was Luther's attack on the Church from without, there was Loyola's move for austerity and discipline from within. Copernicus dealt a blow to earth's self-esteem, Montaigne to man's self-esteem; and Machiavelli openly advocated what people thought was jungle-law, the law of the wily fox and of the fierce lion. No wonder the Elizabethans were perplexed. No wonder a certain unresolved ambivalence entered into their speculations. The mediaeval certitude was being eroded, the Renaissance morning glory was suffering obscuration on account of the fog and smog of the new doctrines concerning the nature of man. The thinking Elizabethan could carry the burden of the debate in his head, the Elizabethan dramatic poet could galvanise the dialectic in his tragedy or comedy. As Hardin Craig observes,

"Now, what does this situation reveal as to the Renaissance conception of truth itself? It may be said that it suspends truth . . . truth becomes, not a fixed proposition, but a shifting, elusive, debatable thing to be determined by dialectical acumen before it shines forth in rhetorical clarity by its own unassisted effulgence. It follows also that every question has two sides, and that the acutest minds would habitually see both sides. . . . Shakespeare, the acutest of Renaissance thinkers, had a boasted breadth of mind, an ability to see both sides of a question, and a sympathy with all sorts and conditions of men. . . . Is it not fair, then, to regard Shakespeare as an exemplification of controversial broadmindedness in an age of advocacy?"<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *The Enchanted Glass*, p. 157.



Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and godlike reason  
To fust in us unus'd.

Hamlet was Shakespeare's figuring, not of the perfect man, but of the 'complete' man; he is his father's son, and even his mother's son, but he is something more also — a creature of the Renaissance. Summing up his character, Peter Alexander says :

"To what may be called the *instinctive wisdom of antiquity and her heroic passions*, represented so impressively by Hamlet's father, Shakespeare has united the *meditative wisdom of later ages* in Hamlet himself. There is no surrender of the old pieties, and the idea of the drama comes from the impact of new circumstances upon the old forms of feeling and estimation; there is a conflict between new exigencies and old pieties, that have somehow to be reconciled".<sup>31</sup>

Hamlet is the junction between the old and the new, between mediaeval and modern; he is deflated man trying to forge a new value for himself, perplexed man reasoning himself back to faith, paralysed man energising himself back to purposive action, defeated man winning his way to victory through the sacrificial holocaust of tragedy.

The climate of thought in Shakespeare's time was thus neither stuffy nor cyclonic. The sense of cosmological order, the feeling for hierarchy, the apprehension of a homogeneous continuum from the microcosm to the macrocosm, the belief in the possibility of man living in harmonious relationship with his environment — society, Nature, the universe — under the benevolent eyes of God, all persisted notwithstanding the occasional squalls tending to disrupt the old order, the gentle opiate breezes that tended to induce an ignorance of these theological and philosophical bases of the human condition on earth. Was it possible that Shakespeare felt the anguish of the widening cracks in the old Faith and the insufficiency of the new ethos (if such it could be called)? Jean Paris writes :

"Between the collapse of mediaeval faith and the first modern philosophies, man's mind, threatened by its own chaos, was forced to have recourse to a transcendental wisdom... to restore to man, by a mystical purification, the feeling of his divinity".<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Hamlet: Father and Son* (1955), p. 184.

<sup>32</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 87.



What is this 'mystical purification'? Is it of the same order that makes Hamlet say, after his return from his projected trip to England, that "there's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (V.ii.10)? Or are we to believe (with Jean Paris) that Shakespeare flirted with occultism, and that it led him to Rosicrucian philosophy? Here, alas, we enter the Serbonian bog of symbolistic interpretation, and we had better hold ourselves back.

### III

#### DRAMA, NATIVE AND FOREIGN

If Elizabethan 'thought' was really mediaeval thought trying to hold its own against the three-pronged attacks from Copernicus, Montaigne, and Machiavelli, and in the result harbouring an ambivalence—a contradiction—or, perhaps, achieving a synthesis, a new harmony, Elizabethan 'drama' too was really a continuation of mediaeval drama, slowly accommodating itself to the spirit and forms of Greek and Latin drama which came to be introduced in England, largely through translations, in the 16th century. On the one hand, there was the long and respectable native tradition; on the other hand, there was, in the wake of the Renaissance, the imported tradition associated with the tragedies of Seneca, the comedies of Plautus and Terence, and so going back a few more centuries to the comedies of Aristophanes and Menander, and the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The two traditions met, and out of the resulting cross-fertilisation 'Elizabethan drama' was born.

It is difficult, of course, to decide which of the two traditions—the 'native' or the 'foreign'—had the larger say in determining the course of Elizabethan drama. "English drama", says the Classicist H. D. F. Kitto, "however much it may have owed to the Renaissance, was an heir to the Middle Ages".<sup>33</sup> Perhaps, it is not exactly right to talk of 'native' and 'foreign' drama, since the former had its beginnings as religious drama, and this had after all a broad European vogue. Church drama was Catholic and European, and Roman elements—ultimately

<sup>33</sup> *Form and Meaning in Drama* (1959), p. 221.

Hebraic elements — conditioned it. "It may be taken as certain", says A. W. Pollard, "that the sacred drama had no independent origin on English soil, but was introduced into this country after the Norman conquest".<sup>34</sup> In his classic study, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (1955), Hardin Craig says that this drama "began in the church and not in the theatre, in song and not in spoken dialogue, in worship and not in entertainment, and in Latin and not in English".<sup>35</sup> The routine daily services and the special annual festivals in Indian temples even today partake of the character of religious drama. Often the sacred language, Sanskrit, is used, and sometimes the local vernacular takes its place; and the 'action', such as it is, has an apparently human cast, though it is also invariably charged with a symbolic significance. There are local variations, too, and occasionally the ludicrous mingles with the sublime. The gods have numerous names ("He is one, the sages call Him variously"), there are Divine Consorts, Divine Carriers (Birds, Beasts), Divine Habiliments, and Divine Arms; there are god-intoxicated Saints (*bhaktas*, *Alvars*, *Nayanmars*, *Sants*) who serve the Lord; and the gods of neighbouring temples exchange visits, and there is ceremonial hospitality. The old Puranic legends — or the events sanctified in local tradition or *sthalapurana* — are re-enacted on festive days, and there is much popular excitement, and people from neighbouring villages often congregate to offer worship and participate in the drama involving God, Nature and Man. The mass of the people still seem to find in these festivals something that answers to an inner need. The liturgy in the *garbagriha* (the Holy of Holies) of the temple could be simple and austere and wholly symbolic, while the festival mixture of liturgy and ceremony and drama to the background of music, dance, incantatory recitation, and processional rhythm with periodic 'stops' could be maddeningly variegated, popular, and only symbolic in part. Like the Passion Play at Oberammergau in Bavaria, *Ramlila* (the story of *Ramayana*, of the Prince who became God) is celebrated in North India with passion and purpose, and also in a holiday spirit. By and large, the aim of all religious drama — at whatever level it may be conceived, in whatever way it may be presented — is to justify the ways of

<sup>34</sup> *English Miracle Plays, Moralities, and Interludes* (8th edition), p. xx.

<sup>35</sup> p. 1.

God to men and to promote the religious sense, the true faith and genuine piety among the people, to awaken the mind and heart of sinners and the devout alike to a new awareness of their relation to God. Accordingly various elements, — cosmogony, theology, ethics, the lives of the saints, local religious traditions, — go into the mixture in various proportions, and they do not always fuse into art. On the other hand, religious drama is essentially a communal affair, the entire community becoming 'sharers in the action' to a greater or lesser extent. It must have been like this in England — and Europe — during the Middle Ages and for some time after the Renaissance.

"It happens", says Hardin Craig, "that at a definite time and place there came together in an exercise of representative art the three main factors that are the constituents of drama, namely, impersonation, action, and dialogue".<sup>36</sup> So it had been in 6th century B.C., when Greek drama began; and so it was in the Europe of the Middle Ages. Although originating in the liturgy of the Church, once this drama had acquired a character of its own, it was easy to substitute the local vernacular for Latin, members of the local trade-guilds as actors in the place of the priest and his assistants, and to shift the 'theatre' from the church to the churchyard and finally to the open spaces. Religious drama in England had an active history of about 250 years (1300-1550), beginning perhaps with dramatic dialogues during church services in the 9th century, and developing from mere dialogues dramatic scenes — brief, earnest, crude — and ultimately linked sequences of such scenes which became 'plays' at last. Although a distinction is made in European religious drama between Mysteries (which deal with events recorded in the Bible, the New Testament rather than the Old) and Miracle Plays which dramatise the lives of the saints, in English religious drama the two types seem to coalesce, bible narration and mediaeval legends mingling freely with apocryphal Gospels. Once introduced, the Miracle Plays gained quick popularity, and for about 3 centuries they were frequently produced in over 100 English towns and villages. The organisation of the Corpus Christi celebrations from 1311 onwards made it possible to present a whole group of plays in natural sequence, thus giving an opportunity

<sup>36</sup> *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages*, p. 19.

to each of the numerous trade-guilds of a town to take a share in the production.

Referring to the remains of the Miracle Plays, Hardin Craig pithily says that they "remind one of the undestroyed parts of a badly damaged city".<sup>37</sup> However, from the 4 full Corpus Christi cycles (York, Towneley, Chester and Coventry) now luckily extant, we can form a fair idea of the scope and quality of this class of drama. The plays in the York cycle, for example, are 48 in number, and cover the history of the universe from God's first act of creation to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and the several dramatic pieces were originally assigned to be performed by various groups of artisans like tanners, plasterers, cardmakers, coopers, armourers, glovers, bookbinders, hosiers, chandlers, shoers of horses, ironmongers, skimmers, bakers, cooks, tilemakers, painters, butchers, carpenters, potters, weavers, etc.<sup>38</sup> The germs of comedy, tragedy, even history are already in these plays, and there are also scenes of 'comic relief' "which are to us at times inexpressibly painful, but dramatically they are good art, and welcomed by their spectators as a relief to the extreme tension of feeling which the protracted exhibition of Christ's Passion could not fail to excite".<sup>39</sup> This tradition of mixing serious tragedy with comic interludes was to persist in Elizabethan drama, and even in Shakespeare (for example, the grave-diggers' scene in *Hamlet* or the porter scene in *Macbeth*). It is not unlikely that Shakespeare as a boy saw a miracle play or two, at least a *Herod* piece.

The Morality Plays came later into the field by about 100 years, and were originally complementary to the Miracle Plays. Superficially, the characters in the Moralities were Abstractions, and under the guise of allegory this new kind of drama tried both to imitate and influence life. With their originality in plot, an underlying seriousness in tone, and bold characterisation, these plays made a more immediate appeal, and in their introduction of comic scenes the Moralities were rather in advance of the Miracle plays. A recurrent character, Vice, — who is Satan's image or tool, half Iniquity half Absurdity, half knave half fool, — with his propensity for evil-doing, for punning and

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>38</sup> Pollard, *English Miracle Plays*, pp. xxx-xxxv.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. xli.

quibbling, and also for engineering fun, was the source of most of the complication and confusion, and was evidently the remote predecessor of the Elizabethan characters Merrygreek, Diccon, Feste and perhaps Falstaff as well. Actually, the centre of interest in a Morality Play is the conflict between Good and Evil, the Seven Cardinal Virtues and the Seven Deadly Sins. The Good Angel and the Bad Angel (prefiguring the Good and Bad Angels in *Doctor Faustus*) already appear in *Mary Magdalene*, one of the better-known Miracle Plays, but the Moralities accentuate the polarisation still further. Of the extant Morality Plays, while the long *Castell of Perseverance* is encyclopaedic, tracing as it does the spiritual history of man from birth to God's final judgement on him, *Everyman* concentrates on man's *last* journey so full of alternations between hope and despair. It has been called by Hardin Craig "a universalised allegory of the Dance of Death", and when all abandon Everyman, Good Dedes tells him :

All erthly thynges is bul vanyte,  
Beaute, Strength and Dyscrecyon do man forsake,  
Folysshe frendes and kynnes men that fayre spake,  
All fleeth save Good Dedes, and that am I.

At the heart of the Morality Play high seriousness sits brooding out the inevitability of death, and hence the 'plot' is simply the sequence of man's fall and redemption :

"It is the plot of the microcosm over against that of the macrocosm to the representation of which the mystery play... is devoted, and the value and significance of the English morality is by this comparison greatly enhanced. Its principle is universality, and that principle deducible from the vast history of man's fall and redemption".<sup>40</sup>

It is not surprising that *Everyman* — the prototypical Morality Play — should have modern parallels like those of Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Michael Burn (*The Modern Everyman*, 1948). Indeed, the pattern of the Morality Play could be said to be more basic still. Hardin Craig thinks that, although supernatural intervention is avoided, the Elizabethan 'crime' plays — with their circuit of temptation, sin, discovery, repentance, punishment, hope of redemption — have essentially the same pattern as the

<sup>40</sup> Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages*, p. 344.

Morality Play. Not *Doctor Faustus* alone, but *Macbeth* also, could be called a Morality Play in the *Everyman* tradition, for in all three there is a fierce moral earnestness that seems peculiarly characteristic of the English people. It is also possible to see in *Measure for Measure* (especially in the Duke's role as Masked Providence) some of the features of the Morality Play.

A further development—the so-called 'Interlude'—occurred at about the beginning of the 16th century. More comedy than serious play, more farce than comedy, the Interlude thrived on humorous situations and sparkling dialogue. Yet, at its best, the Interlude too "reflected still the mediaeval concern for human salvation, showing Youth at war with Temptation and led astray by Vice's successor, Riot, the symbol of debauchery".<sup>41</sup> *Thersytes* aims at showing that "the greatest boesters are not the greatest doers"; and, indeed, Thersytes the would-be hero who talks big is found to be hysterically afraid of a snail! John Heywood's Interludes (notably *The Pardoner and the Frere* and *Four PP*) are justly famous, but with him were also associated others, Medwall, Rastell and especially Sir Thomas More, who gave centrality to the group.<sup>42</sup> The tradition of the Interlude survives, not only in brief scenes in Elizabethan drama (the procession of the Worthies in *Love's Labour's Lost*, for example), but also in the modern one-act play which has acquired a very wide currency because of mass media like the Radio and Television.

All three types of plays—Miracle, Morality and Interlude—continued to be produced throughout the 16th century, and occasionally they were revived even in the following century. During the 300 years of its vogue, native drama in its different forms had quickened the dramatic impulse and awakened the desire for new creation in the genre. It had prepared audiences ready to respond to new forms of drama, and it had stimulated new adventures in dramatic production. Above all this drama had, in Pollard's words, "prepared the ground from which the Elizabethan harvest was to spring in all its glorious abundance, and in this indirect manner their influence had been potent for good".<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Reese, *Shakespeare*, p. 50.

<sup>42</sup> Vide A. W. Reed, *Early Tudor Drama* (1926).

<sup>43</sup> *English Miracle Plays*, p. lxxvii.

So much for the 'native' tradition. The 'classical' imported tradition was largely the gift of the Renaissance. Greek drama, Greek drama in translation, adaptations from Greek drama, Latin drama, Latin drama in translation or adaptation, Greek or Latin drama in translation at second-hand or third-hand from an intermediary Italian translation,—in all these forms, in descending order of purity, the Classical tradition came, first in a trickle, then as a stream of rushing muddy water, but seldom as the Pierrian spring. The revived interest in Classical drama, the formation of Companies of professional actors, and the construction of regular theatres in London from 1576 onwards, all led to the production of plays in English more or less after the 'classical' model. In Europe, Giraldi and Lodovico Dolce, Jodelle and Garnier, tried their hands at tragedy of the Senecan type, and had some success. In England, apart from crude attempts like Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pithias*, the first important experiment was *Gorboduc* (1562) by Sackville and Norton. Vaguely Senecan in conception, it made allowances to the Englishman's taste for action by providing a Chorus, a symbolic dumb-show before each Act, and by making messengers (as in Classical tragedy) report deaths and violent happenings. We may discover in the play traces of the Morality Play and also the germs of the future Shakespearian tragedy. The brothers, Ferrex and Porrex, distantly recall Eteocles and Polynices of Greek tragedy and Goneril and Regan of *King Lear*. Written in blank verse, the play is serious, wooden, dull. The following lines by Marcella are a sample of the verse when it is not wholly lifeless (IV. ii. 166):

Oh where is ruth? or where is pitie now?  
 Whither is gentle hart and mercy fled?  
 Are they exiled out of our stony brestes,  
 Neuer to make returne? is all the world  
 Drowned in bloud, and soneke in cruellie?  
 If not in women mercy may be found,  
 If not (alas) within the mothers breast,  
 To her own childe, to her owne fleshe and bloud,  
 If ruthe be banished thence, if pitie there  
 May haue no place, if there no gentle hart  
 Do liue and dwell, where should we seeke it then?

Nevertheless, *Gorboduc* "made beginnings — though little more than beginnings — which were to be developed into the peculiar

merits of Elizabethan tragedy".<sup>44</sup> The unique Senecan qualities — a moralising chorus, a restless Ghost demanding vengeance, the scattering of aphorisms, a rising tide of language to suit the swelling theme of violence, the retailing of 'off-stage' horrors with an almost sadistic relish — were all imitated in English with indifferent success till Kyd at last triumphantly Englished Seneca in *The Spanish Tragedy* (1589). Another Classical strain, the presentation of the heroic hero, after a first sketch in Preston's *Cambyzes* (1569), led up to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*; "Hercules, as he appears in Sophocles, Euripides, and above all Seneca", says Eugene M. Waith, "is revitalised in *Tamburlaine*".<sup>45</sup> In Comedy, likewise, the first efforts to imitate Plautus and Terence (as in Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*, 1566) led up in the course of the next two decades to the comedies of Peele and Greene, and the early comedies of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's immediate contemporaries during the early part of his dramatic career were the 'University Wits'. A comparison of their work with Shakespeare's early work reveals both their influence on him and the limitations of that influence. There are the deceptive lights of Euphuism in Shakespeare's early comedies; Marlowe's influence cannot be in question when we read *Edward II* and *Richard II* or *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice* together. Of course, all roads in Shakespeare, all roads in Elizabethan drama, lead to the central glory, the central mystery, of *Hamlet*. After quoting the following lines from *Doctor Faustus* —

Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damned,  
And canst thou not be saved? . . . —

Percy Simpson comments:

"It is this anguish of uncertainty that strikes the note of tragedy in the play. It is a venture into an uncharted region which only Shakespeare was to explore thoroughly: these faint tracks of the pioneer point the way to *Hamlet*".<sup>46</sup>

Likewise the importance of Kyd — of the Revenge Play itself — to English drama is simply that "it contributed *Hamlet*".<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> John W. Cunliffe, Introduction to *Early English Classical Tragedies* (1912), p. lxxxii.

<sup>45</sup> *The Herculean Hero* (1962), p. 63.

<sup>46</sup> *Studies in Elizabethan Drama* (1955), p. 99.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 178.



When we take a dip at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna near Allahabad, is it possible to say which part of the water is from one river and which from the other river? Following their course a little backwards, we could see that the Ganges is the richer but muddier river, while the Jumna is the clearer and purer river. We can say similarly that the native English tradition is the richer, the more complex, almost the muddier stream, and that the classical tradition, tracing its origins from ancient Hellas and god-like Aeschylus is the simpler, clearer, purer stream. It is the difference between the extravagant Gothic style of a cathedral and the simple symmetrical style of the Greek temple. English drama has more of the richness and manifoldness of life, while Classical drama brings out forcibly the central human predicament on earth. One is extensive and comprehensive, the other is intensive and limited; but it was the native tradition that finally triumphed.

## IV

## PLAYHOUSES AND COMPANIES

"We are moving in shadowy regions of conjecture".<sup>48</sup> These are E. K. Chambers's words in connection with his discussion of the interrelations of the two different types of staging at Rome and Ferrara on the one hand and the woodcut illustrations in the printed editions of Terence on the other; "the synchronism between the revival of classical acting and the emergence of scenic features in such illustrations is certainly marked".<sup>49</sup> But Chambers's words may be applied also to the wider context of the whole mist-covered region of the Elizabethan playhouses, Elizabethan Companies, and Elizabethan acting. Chambers's own researches in the field have been truly monumental, the results being now available in the 2 volumes of *The Mediaeval Stage* (1913) and the 4 volumes of *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923). The publication by W. W. Greg of *Henslowe's Diary* (2 volumes) and *Henslowe Papers* (1904-8) and of *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses* in 2 volumes (1931) has thrown

<sup>48</sup> *The Elizabethan Stage*, Vol. III, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

light on certain problems relating to the physical and financial aspects of the staging of plays in Shakespeare's England. But the obscurity remains. An inquiry concerning the playhouses and actors of the Elizabethan Age involves the history of perhaps 20 regular theatres and 30-40 Companies of actors spread over a period extending from 1558 to 1642 or, should we restrict the field, from 1576 to 1616. Hundreds of playwrights were between them responsible for a few thousands of plays, out of which only a fraction has survived. Although the production of new plays must have averaged 50 per year, "of the plays written for the professional companies between 1560 and 1590 less than half-a-dozen have survived in print".<sup>50</sup> The mist clears a little — but only a little — after 1592, when Philip Henslowe ('citizen and dyer of London') started making laconic entries in his *Diary* regarding his varied business transactions with the theatres and actors of his time.

Like the dramatic tradition, the English theatrical tradition too goes back to at least the beginning of the fourteenth century, for like 'soul' and 'body' the two elements — the play and its production — really make one entity and hence the two traditions are really one complex, confusing, vicissitudinous, but living tradition. We have seen how the Miracle Plays were first performed within the Church, then in the more spacious Churchyard, and at last in the open spaces. The actors likewise changed from priests and their assistants to members of trade-guilds and, finally, to professional actors. When Morality Plays and Interludes came along, and plays came to be performed not in certain seasons (during or around the religious festivals) only but over the whole year almost (on all Sundays and other holidays), there arose the need for something more than mere makeshift arrangements like improvised scaffolds in a bull-garden or a bear-garden or a market-place or any street or open-place or any spacious hall in a private residence. Noblemen's houses had big Halls suitable for the purpose, but only when the owners themselves were interested in the project could the Halls be made use of. The Dining Halls in colleges (at Oxford and Cambridge), the Inns of Court (in London), and at great houses (like Hampton Court) had a dais at one end and, at the other

<sup>50</sup> G. B. Harrison, *Introducing Shakespeare* (1939), p. 30.

end, ornamental screens and doors leading through the gallery behind to the kitchens below, — an arrangement that facilitated both the seating of illustrious visitors (who could sit on the dais) and the acting of the play (the 'entrances' and 'exits' being provided by the doors behind the screens). But such Halls could be used only on special occasions. By and by, when staging at Court became frequent, the decorative elements gained some predominance and stage architecture provided for one or two 'houses' through which also the characters in the drama could come and go. In spite of all such developments, the staging at court remained basically a simple affair, and much was left to the spectators' imagination.

Elizabethan actors invariably sought the patronage of noblemen for more than one reason. Wearing the livery of a nobleman with some influence at the Court gave both prestige and some security to the actor, for otherwise he was too easily liable to be taken for a rogue or vagabond, and prosecuted by the petty officers of the Lord Mayor. When James Burbage and five others asked for permission of Lord Leicester in 1572 to be accepted as his Servants, they made it clear that they did not mean "to crave any further stipend or benefite at your Lordshippes handes but our Lyveries as we have had, and also your honors License to certifye that we are your household Servaunts when we shall have occasion to travayle amongst our frendes as we do usuallye once a yere, and as other noble-mens Players do and have done in tyme past". The Livery and the Licence were what the actors were after, and, besides, whenever they played before their Patron they received due recompense. Often the influential nobility had their own retainers and entertainers — as many Indian native Princes till very recently patronised sportsmen, musicians and actors — and some of them, with the collaboration of other actors if necessary, could produce plays on occasion for the delectation of their patrons.

Again, by its very structure, a mediaeval inn seemed suitable for conversion into a theatre of sorts. The open space or inn-yard in the middle could accommodate the audience; the verandas (galleries) surrounding the inn-yard could be used, partly as the stage, and partly for seating more of the audience; and the inn-rooms had their uses too, — for example, the room behind the 'stage' could be used as an 'inner stage'. If neces-

sary, an entire inn could be rented for a period to serve the double purpose of lodging the players and producing the plays. There are records of plays being thus produced at inns like the Boar's Head, the Saracen's Head, the Bell, the Tabard (made immortal by Chaucer), the Cross Keyes, the Red Lion, the Bull and the Bel Savage. The complaint of the players was that too much of their 'takings' went as rent, and there was also the inevitable uncertainty involved in the arrangement. Besides the staging at Court and at noblemen's houses and the public 'commercial' staging at the inn-yards, there was also the acting by the schoolboys of the Chapel Royal, St. Paul's, and other schools, which gained popularity over a period of many years. Even local residents and the authorities of the City couldn't very much frown upon the production of plays when the actors were but children. Especially for 7 or 8 years after 1599, the Children of St. Paul's, under Lord Derby's patronage, enjoyed a great vogue to which there is pointed reference in *Hamlet* (II. ii. 335 ff). To a question from Hamlet, Rosencrantz answers :

... there is, sir, an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapp'd for't. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose quills and dare scarce come hither.

And Hamlet is so excited by the phenomenon that his mind races and he muses about the present and the future of these children :

What, are they children ? Who maintains 'em ? How are they escoted ? Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing ? Will they not say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to common players—as it is most like, if their means are no better—their writers do them wrong to make them exclaim against their own succession ?

In the late nineteen twenties and early thirties, a troupe of boy players in Madras enjoyed phenomenal success and toured the Districts and even Ceylon ; a few years hence, they were heard of no more. In the cinema world, too, child 'stars' only rarely retain their stardom in maturity. There is indeed an uncanny quality in the perception that Shakespeare has put into Hamlet's words.

To return to the 'common stages' and the 'common players', it was clear by the middle of Elizabeth's reign that plays were becoming more and more popular, and more and more secular; and there was accordingly a growing demand for 'permanent' theatres. The contemporary clergy, however, had Puritan leanings or at least strong anti-Catholic feelings, and hence saw in dramatic productions only occasions for frivolity, vice and blasphemy. Drama had had its origins in the liturgy of the Catholic Church: how was one to differentiate between the fruit and the parent tree? There were also critics like Stephen Gosson who, in his *School for Abuse* (1579), referred to players and jesters as the "Caterpillars of a Commonwealth" and charged them with inciting "popular debauchery". The civic governors of the City of London, with their love of quiet and their absorption in money-making, found little in the Drama of their time to claim their encouragement or even approval. Thus the players had no easy time, and although their critics couldn't quite suppress Drama altogether, they tried to keep it out of the city at least. On the other hand, the Queen herself liked to see a play now and then, for she was a child more of the Renaissance than of the Reformation; and the nobility took their cue from her, and quite a few of the noblemen had leanings towards the Drama, and some were themselves playwrights. A cold war between the pro-theatre and anti-theatre elements followed, resulting in due course in a compromise typical of the English race and especially typical of Elizabeth. Far more subtle and sensitive and sophisticated than the city fathers and the kill-joy Puritans, Elizabeth's tastes were also, as A. L. Rowse points out (*William Shakespeare: A Biography*, 1963), "more in keeping with average human nature. Not the least of the debts that English-speaking people owe to this remarkable woman is her encouragement of the Elizabethan drama and her holding the line against its enemies." When regular theatres were thus suffered to be constructed outside the city limits, James Burbage (who had been originally the chief among Lord Leicester's men) built in 1576 'The Theatre' in Shoreditch, a northern suburb of London. It cost him £700, part of the capital being provided by his brother-in-law, John Brayne. In the same year, Richard Farrant turned part of the Blackfriars priory—which was at the edge of the city and fringed the river—into

an indoor theatre, more a hall with theatrical possibilities than a full-fledged theatre. Soon afterwards, perhaps in 1577, the Curtain Theatre was opened, close to Burbage's Theatre in Shoreditch. Other theatres sprang up in course of time — the Rose (1587), the Swan (1596), the Globe (1599), the Fortune (1600) — and there was evidently use for them all.

Shakespeare might have first joined Leicester's men, or more probably the Queen's men, and on coming to London acted for a time with Pembroke's men. The plague years (1592-4) found the players — though not, probably, Shakespeare — touring the provinces. In 1594, the players returned to London, and for a while the great tragic actor, Edward Alleyn, made up a company consisting of actors drawn from the two major companies, Lord Chamberlain's men and Lord Admiral's men, and presented a few plays — among them, an early version of *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Titus Andronicus* — at the theatre in Newington Butts. The company broke up, however, and Alleyn (who married Henslowe's step-daughter) formed a new Lord Admiral's company and shifted to the Rose Theatre (owned by Henslowe) and reigned there for many more years. Two of his former associates, Richard Burbage (James's son) and William Kemp, now established Lord Chamberlain's company, taking Shakespeare also into partnership, and started playing at the Theatre, with the neighbouring Curtain available as 'easer'. The Rose and the Theatre were the leading contenders for popularity for the next few years. In 1597, when the lease for the Theatre at Shoreditch expired after the originally stipulated 21 years, the landlord created difficulties in the matter of its renewal. The indoor theatre at Blackfriars which James Burbage had bought as a stand-by was not allowed to be used on account of opposition by the residents of the locality. For the time being the inconvenient Curtain Theatre was used by the company, but they wanted another, more commodious, playhouse. James Burbage was by now dead, and his sons, Cuthbert and Richard, bought a site near the Rose and with maladroitness pulled down the Theatre and brought the timber to the new site, and so the Globe Theatre came up at last and started its sensational career in 1599. To avoid rivalry from the Chamberlain's men at such close quarters, the Admiral's men (playing at the Rose since 1594) decided to move to the other side of the river,

and so the Fortune Theatre came up in 1600. The same carpenter, Peter Street, who had built the Globe, was now commissioned to construct the Fortune. Excepting that the Globe was circular (at least octagonal) in shape whereas the Fortune was designed to be a Square, in most other respects the one was planned to be an almost exact replica of the other. The agreement between Henslowe and Alleyn on the one part and Peter Street on the other has been luckily rescued from oblivion and is one of the vital links in our attempts to reconstruct the shape, dimensions and interior divisions of an Elizabethan theatre. The following details, for example, are quite significant :

"The frame of the said house to be set square, and to contain four-score foot of lawful assize every way square without, and fifty-five foot of like assize square every way within... to be wrought one foot of assize at the least above the ground.

And the said frame to contain three stories in height. The first or lower story to contain twelve foot of lawful assize in height, The second story eleven foot of lawful assize in height, and The third or upper story to contain nine foot of lawful assize in height.

All which stories shall contain twelve foot and a half of lawful assize in breadth throughout, besides a jutty forwards in either of the said two upper stories of ten inches of lawful assize, with four convenient divisions for gentlemen's rooms, and other sufficient and convenient divisions for twopenny rooms, with necessary seats to be placed and set as well in those rooms as throughout all the rest of the galleries of the said house ; and with such like stairs, conveyances, and divisions, without and within, as are made and contrived in and to the late erected playhouse on the Bank... called the Globe ;

With a Stage and Tiring-house to be made, erected and set up within the said frame, with a shadow or cover over the said stage... And which stage shall contain in length forty and three foot of lawful assize, and in breadth to extend to the middle of the yard of the said house... And the said frame, stage and staircases to be covered with tile, and to have a sufficient gutter of lead, to carry and convey the water from the covering of the said stage to fall backwards...

And the said house, and other things before mentioned to be made and done, to be in all other contrivitions, conveyances, fashions, things and things, effected, finished, and done according to the manner and fashion of the said house called the Globe..."

The comparison with the Globe recurs like a refrain throughout the document, and we may therefore conclude that it describes, not only the contemplated Fortune, but also the existing (and flourishing) Globe.

From the Theatre built by James Burbage to the Globe built 23 years later by his son, Richard, partly out of the material of the former, and the Fortune built in imitation of the Globe, the Elizabethan open-air theatre seems to have retained the same essential characteristics. The Theatre itself had no more than fused together the distinguishing features of the Elizabethan inn-yards and great Halls in noblemen's houses — two types of improvised 'theatres' where plays had been successfully produced for generations. Burbage and others constructed theatres, not so much because the inn-yards were functionally insufficient, but rather because too great a proportion of the 'takings' had to be paid as rent and interferences from the Lord Mayor's officers had been too frequent. The Halls, on the other hand, were not available for the production of plays as a commercial speculation. From a scrutiny of the Henslowe-Alleyn agreement with Peter Street, and also of a sketch of the Swann Theatre made in 1596 by a Dutch traveller named Johannes de Witt, we can draw certain conclusions about the Elizabethan playhouse, and supplement these with judicious guess-work on the basis of a study of the stage-directions in the printed plays of the period. That the Elizabethan theatre was not so barren in its stage properties, or so bankrupt in its ingenuity, as has often been supposed may be deduced from an examination of the complete inventory found amongst the Henslowe papers of the properties belonging to the Admiral's company in 1598, some of the items being: 1 rock, 1 cage, 1 tomb, 1 Hell mouth; 1 bedstead, 8 lances, 2 steeples, 1 chime of bells, 1 globe, 1 golden sceptre, 3 clubs, 2 marchpanes, 1 golden fleece, 2 rackets, 1 bay tree, 1 lion skin, 1 bear's skin, Iris head and rainbow, 1 little altar, 8 visards, 1 wooden mattock, Cupid's bow and quiver, 1 snake, 1 tree of golden apples, 9 iron targets, 17 foils, Mercury's wings, Tasso's picture, 1 bull's head, 1 great horse with his legs; 1 wheel and frame in the Siege of London, 1 Pope's mitre, 1 ghost's crown, 1 black dog; etc. etc. The Elizabethan theatre, whether it was circular or octagonal or square, was a small place accommodating between 1,500 (in the Theatre at Shoreditch) and less than 2,500 in the Rose and the Fortune, and hardly more than 2,000 in the Globe. The Swan, said de Witt, found room for as many as 3000 spectators. Admission cost one penny at the gates, and an extra penny or two pence for the gallery; prices could be doubled whenever a



new play was presented for the first time. The plays usually began in the afternoons at 2, and went on for over 2 hours; in the summer months, however, the plays commenced only at 3. The Elizabethan producer had neither lighting problems to worry about nor special lighting effects to exploit. Except those who had seats in the gallery, the rest of the spectators had to stand in a crowded 'pit' defying the cold and the occasional drizzle.

Although the conflicting, confusing evidence baffles firm generalisation, some broad conclusions seem nevertheless to emerge. The main stage projected into the 'pit' or yard—the Globe stage, according to J. Cranford Adams, protruded 29 feet from the back wall, or quite half the area of the yard—and was thus exposed on three sides; the actor was very much closer to the audience than he would be today, and this must have made the 'soliloquy' sound to Elizabethan ears far more natural than we are apt to imagine by merely reading the play. Behind the stage there were three doors, and perhaps two more, one on either flank. The doors were perhaps camouflaged by curtains, and 'entrances', 'exits', retirements or withdrawals into the 'inner stage', and movements of servants, soldiers, citizens or others were facilitated by these multiple doors. From a trap door below the stage a ghost could suddenly seem to rise, and from the upper stage (or balcony) a character could converse with another standing below on the main stage. On the third storey of the theatre, on a level with the top galleries, was the music room. On the middle storey, again, not only the projecting balcony, but the tarras and the two side window-stages could be used to some effect. After a careful balance of probabilities, E. K. Chambers sums up his surmises regarding the actual manner of stage-setting as follows:

"The great majority of them, both out-of-door scenes and hall-scenes, were acted on the open stage, under the heavens, with no more properties and practicable *terrains* than could reasonably be carried on by the actors, lowered from the heavens, raised by traps, or thrust on by frames and wheels. For more permanent background they had the scenic doors, the gallery above, the scenic curtain, and whatever the tire-man might choose to insert in the aperture, backed by an alcove within the tire-house... For entrances they had at least the scenic doors and aperture. The comparatively few chamber scenes were set either in the alcove or in a chamber 'above', formed by throwing together two compartments

of the gallery. A window in a still higher story could, if necessary, be brought into play".<sup>51</sup>

Further, although there were lighting effects, there was no dearth of sound effects. Thunder and artillery could be imitated from the top storey, and there was provision for trumpet calls, sennets, tuckets, flourishes, etc.; and music above all — both background music and music and song in the course of the play. It is also suggested by M. M. Reese that "just as in the mediaeval Mysteries the action sometimes left the pageant-car for the street, so an envoy from abroad, perhaps, might arrive in state by way of the auditorium, the groundlings being thrust aside to make room for him. In this case he would almost certainly arrive on horseback".<sup>52</sup> This would be more like the practice of the traditional theatre in Japan — the Noh and the Kabuki. One other point that needs to be made is that Elizabethan plays were written as a rule to be played as continuous wholes, without the cut and dried intervals implied by the act-and-scene division of the plays in the printed versions.

As regards the players and their acting, the Elizabethan way of managing things — if rather confusing to us — was, to judge by results, an astonishing reconciliation of divers interests. Nominally groups of actors carried the name and livery of a prominent personage: there were thus Leicester's men, Warwick's men, and Worcester's men; then the Queen's men, drawn from the existing Companies; the Admiral's men and Lord Strange's men in the eighties; and Pembroke's men and Sussex's men in the early nineties. Companies broke up, merged, separated, reformed, or went touring the provinces. At last, by 1594, there were the two principal rival Companies, Admiral's men and Chamberlain's men (composed partly of Lord Strange's), with their respective financiers (Henslowe, James Burbage) and play-houses (Rose and the Theatre; later, the Fortune and the Globe). Tarleton (who was probably Shakespeare's original for Yorick in *Hamlet*) was the most famous comedian of his time: he played for the Queen's men till he died in 1588. Alleyn and Richard Burbage were both tragedians, and they played for the Admiral's men and the Chamberlain's men respectively till the former retired in 1605 and the latter died in 1619. Among the authors

<sup>51</sup> *The Elizabethan Stage*, Vol. III, p. 111.

<sup>52</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 136.

who wrote for the Admiral's men were Kyd, Marlowe, Peece, Greene and Lodge — all 'University Wits'. Another 'University Wit', Lyly, wrote for the children. Nashe's *Isle of Dogs*, produced in 1597 at the Swann by a new group, enraged the authorities much that acting was prohibited in London for a time. Shakespeare was the Chamberlain's principal playwright, and others Ben Jonson also wrote for the Company. In the later nineteen Chapman, Heywood and Jonson wrote for the Admiral's men. It is likely that many dramatists wrote for both the principal companies. From Henslowe's *Diary* we know who wrote for the Admiral's; as for those who wrote for the Chamberlain's Company, it is largely guesswork excepting for Shakespeare himself.

But while the name was that of the Admiral's or the Chamberlain's (in James's reign the latter became the King's men), the actors themselves were more directly concerned with the finance who owned the theatre in which they played. It was only when the Globe was constructed that 50% of the interest was allowed to be shared among 5 prominent players, one of them being Shakespeare, who thus held a 10% share in the company. But even without a regular share like this, membership of a company conferred status, security and reasonably steady income. When the actor was also a dramatist (like Rowley, Jonson, or Heywood), it was a double security. But Shakespeare was actor, dramatist, and a 'housekeeper' and a 'sharer' in the Globe and (after 1608) in the Blackfriars in-door theatre as well, and hence was in a very privileged position indeed. And as a member of the Chamberlain's (or King's), he enjoyed the esteem and fellowship of players like Burbage, Armin, Heminge and Condell.

Elizabethan acting — at least in its earlier and middle phase — was full-blooded acting, each player fully entering into the spirit of his 'part'. Speeches were rhetorical, and called for rapid gesticulation; and it is said that impressionable girls fell in love with some of the actors as much on account of their gestures as on account of their magnificent costumes and the rapid and bold delivery of their speeches. While the rhetorical quality of the speeches was taken for granted, the Prologues (in *Henry V*, for example) and even the Epilogues called for special displays of elocution. Gloucester's opening speech in *Richard III* was another such set piece; so was Portia's speech on Mercy. The Elizabethan (and Jacobean) dramatist was handicapped because



quintum sed ipsum et sanctum, huiusmodi consuetudini  
 omni destinatus, in quo multi orbi, lauri, et singula  
 magnitudinis sancti, offitibus sancti et septis abbatibus, qui

# A PERFORMANCE AT THE SWAN THEATRE

(Copy of a drawing made by Johannes de Witt,  
 a Dutch traveller)



women's parts had to be played by boys whose voices had not cracked. This had one great advantage: Shakespeare and his contemporaries were prevented effectively from exploiting mere sex appeal. Even with a character like Cleopatra, the appeal was that of the incandescence of the poetry of love, not the sensual assault of sex. The smallness of the Elizabethan theatre, the circumstance that the stage projected midway into the yard, the colourful display of the costumes, the disposition of rival groups of characters (armies, factions) by giving different colours to them, the sound effects both for realism and for the creation of atmosphere for suggesting alike discord or harmony, the open-air feeling, the fluidity of movement dispensing with any rigid act-and-scene-division of the play, the insinuation of the illusion of both the passage of time and a sense of timelessness, the imposition of a total unity of impression upon the moving multiplicity of the action, all this called for varied talent, preparation and organisation of a very high degree, and in the Elizabethan stage at its best these were forthcoming. And whatever his limitations, the Elizabethan playgoer had certainly a keen eye, a quick ear, a ready sensibility, and, above all, a lively imagination equal to keeping pace with the highest flights of poetry on the stage. He was tickled by puns and bawdy, he detected contemporary allusions, he mentally participated in the swelling scene and the superb exercises in elocution (Antony's oration, for instance). The supervision and licensing of plays from 1581 onwards by the Master of the Revels, a Court official, far from discouraging drama, really toned up its quality. Elizabethan drama was life, — life freed from the imperatives of responsive action except in the realm of the imagination, but also life that opened up a new awareness of the realities and possibilities of existence.

Of course, when we consider the history of Elizabethan drama, say from 1580 to 1620, or even from 1590 to 1610, it is obvious that there should have been differences in both the style of writing and the style of acting. In *Hamlet*, we have a specimen of the earlier style in the Player's speech (II. ii. 446ff), while Hamlet's soliloquy that concludes the scene is in the later style. In the Romances of the last period, the earlier stylisation in terms of rhetorical devices gives place to a more nervous and natural — but not less poetic — way of speaking. On the other hand,

innovations like the Mask in *The Tempest* and the 'statue scene' in *The Winter's Tale*, with their spectacular appeal, were a change away from realism. Shakespeare changed, and the acting and speaking styles changed, in response to changes in the popular taste; but it is no less true that it was the dramatist and the actor that together also *formed* the popular taste. It was a singular partnership, with invisible reversible reactions, but the result was great drama. In C. J. Sisson's words,

"Whether at the 'public' or the 'private' theatre, the producer did his share to aid the illusion. The actors made it easy to accept the illusion. The poet stimulated and suggested by his creative art. And the audience cooperated with their entertainers, susceptible of illusion and desirous of enjoying it".<sup>53</sup>

We are in the region of imponderables, and strict equations in terms of cause and effect and the apportionment of credits for the different factors involved are neither feasible nor desirable.

## V

### 'THE SHAKESPEARIAN MOMENT'

In the Annual Shakespeare Lecture before the British Academy (1954), Gladys D. Willcock said:

"There is one aspect of Shakespeare's greatness about which I am completely bardolatrous, and that is his wisdom in getting himself born in 1564 and emerging at the Elizabethan spring-tide. Environment did not create genius, but it provided rain and sunshine".<sup>54</sup>

We have discussed in the preceding Sections how "environment . . . provided rain and sunshine" to Shakespeare's genius. When he came to London, he was in a position to benefit by the example of Lyly and Peele, Lodge and Greene, Marlowe and Kyd. He found Companies like the Queen's, Pembroke's, Lord Strange's and the Chamberlain's that wanted actors, authors, and (if possible) actors who were also playwrights. He found the English language in one of its great moments of puissant expansion and versatility, ready to go all out for the conquest of new realms

<sup>53</sup> *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, p. 30.

<sup>54</sup> *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. XL, p. 117.

of meaning and suggestion, new vistas of opulent acoustic possibility, new heights of rhetoric and poetry. He found the language ready for cultivation and harvest, he found the theatres ready, he found the audiences ready. It was Shakespeare's hour, it was the Shakespearian moment.

In his recent book, *Shakespeare's Public* (1960), Martin Holmes has tried to settle the places where Shakespeare's plays were first produced. The first of Shakespeare's plays to be produced, according to Holmes's table, was (what we now call) *1 Henry VI*, at the Rose; and *Titus* too was first produced at the same theatre. At the Theatre at Shoreditch were produced *2 and 3 Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, *King John*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, all before 1597 when the lease of the Theatre ceased. *The Comedy of Errors* had in the meantime been produced at Grays Inn, and *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Dream* at private theatres, the latter perhaps at the time of the wedding of William Stanley, Earl of Derby.<sup>55</sup> During the interregnum between the lapse of the lease of the Theatre at Shoreditch and the construction of the Globe, *1 and 2 Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *Much Ado* were produced at the Curtain, and *Merry Wives* before the Queen at a Garter Feast. With the Globe and the Blackfriars available to Shakespeare, most of the plays of the latter half of his career were performed at one of these theatres in the first instance, and repeated in the other place afterwards. Holmes assigns *As You Like It*, *Julius Caesar*, *Twelfth Night*, *Measure for Measure*, *Timon*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry VIII* — 12 plays in all — to the Globe, and five (*Troilus*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*) to the Blackfriars. *Othello* was apparently first performed at Westminster. Here, again, absolute agreement is unlikely ever to emerge. But it is another tribute yet to Shakespeare's genius — his largest and most comprehensive soul — that he could write plays that pleased royalty and commoners alike, that burst into life in both in-door theatres like the Blackfriars and open-air theatres like the Globe, that delighted audiences 350 years ago and could keep enthralled audiences even today.

<sup>55</sup> *Shakespeare's Public: The Touchstone of His Genius*, p. 38.



## CHAPTER V

### EARLY COMEDY

#### I

#### PRE-SHAKESPEARIAN COMEDY

When Shakespeare started writing plays as a young man, beyond the conviction that he could write, and the determination that he would write, he wasn't apparently burdened with a sense of mission and he didn't have the helpless oppressive feeling that he was being pushed in any particular direction. He was young, his head was filled with romantic fancies, his memory seethed with the ideas and impressions he had gathered from books, and the bracing climate of the hour — the late fifteen-eighties — provoked him to adventurous self-expression. Plautus, Seneca and Ovid were among the authors he had read with assiduity both at school and afterwards, and — was it surprising that, when the urge to write wasn't to be resisted any more, he turned to them was inspiration? Perhaps he started 2 or 3 plays at once, and a poem or two besides, and completed them one by one as the mood of the time dictated. Comedy, farce, tragedy, chronicle play, narrative poem — Shakespeare was game for them all. Whether it was because he was merely avid for experiment or he was really in search of an 'ideal form' for achieving splendid artistic expression, this much is obvious enough: one play is not like another, one situation is not quite a mimicry of another. It is as though in these early plays Shakespeare was accumulating a bank-balance of dramatic backgrounds, artifices and situations to be drawn upon at leisure; it is as though he was making records of experimentation in dramatic verse, rhyme, prose and poetry, for fuller exploitation at a later date. There is little in the maturer or last plays that is not already in the early plays, much as the pure metal is already in the ore, or the

crystal is already in the solution. The ore itself is valuable enough, and yet the question cannot fail to escape us: How does the ore become the metal, how does 'pig iron' become stainless steel? What is this miracle of crystallisation? What is the process, where is the artist's subtle alchemy? George Gordon points out that, although Shakespeare wrote most of his comedies in the first decade of his working life, there is such a leap from crudity to artistic excellence and from such excellence to mellow maturity when we pass from *The Comedy of Errors* to *The Merchant of Venice*, and again from *The Merchant of Venice* to *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. Commenting on this almost incredible phenomenon, Gordon writes:

"Our first interest in these early comedies is chiefly, then, that they are Shakespeare's, and that he wrote so very much better comedies later on. It is a privilege to see genius growing up—to catch, as it were, between man and boy—or, as Beatrice would say, with three hairs on its chin. But there is a further and more technical interest in these early plays. Shakespeare, above every other comic dramatist of his rank, used theatrical stock-in-trade of his time, and in his early plays—since the rest of the cupboard is barer—the anatomy of these conventions is more easily seen".<sup>1</sup>

Five such early comedies as *The Errors*, *The Shrew*, *Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Dream* (the product of a few years that produced much else besides) comprehend so much variety, so much opulence of material—comic, farcical, romantic, satiric, fantastic—and also so much sheer technical virtuosity that we are merely left gaping for the nonce. To watch young Shakespeare at work is to watch versatility testing and measuring itself, rehearsing its possibilities, probing its potentialities, till at last by a natural process of artistic growth it achieved incandescent expression in the plays of his maturity.

Of pre-Shakespearean comedies, apart from *Ralph Roister Doister* (which its author in his Prologue claimed had been modelled on Plautus and Terence) and the farcical *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1566), there was the tradition of the Moralities and the Interludes with stock characters like Vice and Riot. There was, then, the far more important work of the so-called University Wits—notably Lyly, Peele and Greene. Lyly was

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespearean Comedy*, pp. 20-1.

Shakespeare's senior by 11 years, Peele by six years, and Greene by only four. Lyly was an adept at presenting romantic love, he introduced sex disguise in *Galathea*, he created a lively prose dialogue for comedy, he introduced songs (like the famous "Cupid and my Campaspe played/At cards for kisses" in *Alexander and Campaspe*) into his plays, and he freely mixed comedy with fantasy, pastoralism and romance. But poor plotting, promiscuous mythologising, and anaemic characterisation denied greatness or even spectacular success to his comedies. Assessing Lyly's influence on Shakespeare, Kenneth Muir and S. O'Loughlin have written :

"The world of Shakespearian comedy is fundamentally the same as Lyly's. The conventions, the style, the very air we breathe is the same. There can be no doubt that Shakespeare's comedies would have been very different had not Lyly preceded him. Not only was Shakespeare generally indebted to his forerunner, but more than fifty specific borrowings have been pointed out".<sup>2</sup>

Like Lyly's prose, Peele's verse had an ease and liveliness of its own. "As Marlowe's are the mightiest", says Saintsbury, "so are Peele's the softest, lines in the drama before Shakespeare ; while the spirit and humour, which the author also had in plenty, save his work from the merely cloying sweetness of some contemporary writers".<sup>3</sup> Mythology figures largely in *The Arraignment of Paris*, while *David and Bethsabe* excels by its seductive versification. Peele struck a blow to rescue drama from the prosaic and the pedantic, and touched it with the grace of humour and light comedy.

Of the 'University Wits', it was Greene — rather than Lyly or Peele — that made the boldest explorations in the field of romantic comedy before Shakespeare himself came upon the scene. Churton Collins was one of the scholars of an earlier generation that saw clear traces of Greene's influence in the early Shakespeare :

"If, historically speaking, it is only a step from *Edward II* to *Henry V.*, it is, historically speaking, only a step from *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and to *As You Like It*. We have only to glance at the condition of Comedy before it came into Greene's hands

<sup>2</sup> *The Voyage to Illyria* (1937), p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> *A History of Elizabethan Literature*, p. 72.

to see how great was the revolution accomplished by him... We open Greene's Comedies, and we are in the world of Shakespeare; we are with the sisters of Olivia and Imogen, with the brethren of Touchstone and Florizel, in the homes of Phebe and Perdita. We breathe the same atmosphere, we listen to the same language".<sup>4</sup>

But the chronology of the period is so confusing that recent opinion is apt to be less dogmatic and agree more with Norman Sanders in his essay 'The Comedy of Greene and Shakespeare':

"... words like 'debt' and 'influence' with their usual connotations in literary scholarship are unsuitable and inaccurate for describing the relationship which exists between Greene's comedies and Shakespeare's... Any 'influence' which Greene had on Shakespeare must be looked for in the indeterminate areas of comic vision, in the special quality of their imaginative response to life and art as expressed in their comedies. Naturally, any such similarity can only be seen in terms of their ordering of action, creation of character, and their choice of materials and solutions".<sup>5</sup>

Greene's plays were in blank verse with patches of prose, and in an amazing work like *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* we witness such shifting foci of interest that sometimes we are inclined to wonder whether Polonius' reference to "tragical-comical-historical-pastoral" wasn't really an oblique reference to this play, which seems at first sight more a variety entertainment than a finished work of art. In what is perhaps the 'main' plot, Prince Edward tries to woo the peasant girl, Margaret, through his friend, Lacy; but these two themselves fall in love. Like Alexander (in Lyly's play) who allows the painter Apelles to marry Campaspe the Theban captive, Prince Edward too gives leave to Lacy and Margaret to marry. A second plot concerns the marriage of Edward and the Princess of Castille; a third, the jester, Simnell, and other low-comedy characters; and a fourth, the magician's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, who try to outwit each other — under different circumstances, they could almost be Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel of *Love's Labour's Lost*! Greene's *James IV*, partly based on a story by Cinthio, presents the two women, Dorothea and Ida, with sympathy and understanding, and Dorothea has recourse to male disguise for a time.

<sup>4</sup> Introduction to *The Plays of Robert Greene* (Ed. by J. Churton Collins), Vol. I, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> *Early Shakespeare* (Ed. by J. R. Brown and Bernard Harris), 1961, p. 36.

If Ateukin of this play has the makings of a villain like Don John, long-suffering Dorothea who is ready to forgive her errant husband has other, or more inspiring, avatars in Shakespeare's comedies and later romances — Hero and Hermione. There is certainly far more incident and action in Greene's plays than in Lyly's or even Peele's, and in this he is far closer to Shakespeare. His heroines — Margaret, Dorothea, Ida — with a touch of the Master's hand could be transformed into a Julia, a Viola, an Imogen. His comic figures, again, a Nano, a Slipper, seem to foreshadow Launce of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* or Launcelot Gobbo of *The Merchant of Venice*. Greene had doubtless a vivid though not a disciplined imagination, and he was certainly working towards a fusion of comedy and romance, realism in terms of everyday life in Elizabethan England and poetry in terms of romantic love, but whether he could ever have satisfactorily solved his artistic problem, as Shakespeare in fact did, is merely problematic. On the other hand, the filiations between *James IV* and *Friar Bacon* and Shakespeare's comedies were surely more than merely accidental. To quote Sanders again,

"It is in these plays that the kinship with Shakespeare's comedies may be seen most clearly. As with Greene, romantic love is central to Shakespeare's plays; it is not merely a subject for comment or satire, it is the very matter and fibre of these plays. The comedies of both are comic explorations of the nature of love".<sup>6</sup>

The description — "comic explorations of the nature of love" — exactly fits Shakespeare's five early comedies.

## II

### CLASSICAL INFLUENCE

Greene's (or Lyly's) influence on Shakespeare was, after all, of the kind one contemporary exerts on another. We might speculate with greater self-confidence were we sure that Shakespeare knew Greene and the other 'University Wits' intimately, or even professionally as fellow-dramatists. Shakespeare and Marlowe were of the same age, and Greene was only 4 years

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40.

their senior. They lived in the same climate of thought, and they wrote for the same type of audience. And they all derived ample sustenance both from the indigenous dramatic tradition (Miracles, Moralities, Interludes) and the Classical or European tradition,—Greek, Latin, Italian. And this was as important in Comedy as in Tragedy.

In its remote origins, Comedy was a 'revel' at the time of the festivals of Dionysus, and the 'comedians' were perhaps rustics that came from the village to make their own offering to the god. A distinction came to be drawn in later times between the Old and the New Comedy. The Old Comedy, of which Aristophanes was the greatest exponent, was in effect a blend of religious ceremony, serious satire and criticism (political, social, literary), and wit and buffoonery. Beneath the brilliance of the wit and the rollicking entertainment, the *Acharnians* and the *Lysistrata* were a plea for the termination of the war, the *Knights* an exposure of the pitfalls of democracy, and the *Frogs* a critique on the poetry of Euripides. In the New Comedy of Menander during the Macedonian rule of Athens, humour displaced wit, and love edgeways entered the scene. Athens had by then lost her political importance, and Menander could therefore turn from politics to the delineation of human nature as observed by him in the city, once famous, now fallen on evil days. One of his recurrent motifs seems to have been the career of the man or woman exposed as a child and later brought up as a foundling, the play's culminating moment being the resolution of the mystery. It is, in fact, the Oedipus story deflated into comic terms. Euripides' *Ion* (which has inspired Eliot's *The Confidential Clerk* in our own time) had dealt with a similar theme too,—a son in search of his father. In the *Perikeiromene* of Menander, we follow the adventures of the separated twins—the brother, Moschion, and the sister, Glykera—till they discover each other, and also their father, Pataikos. Menander had the same relation to Aristophanes as Euripides had to Aeschylus,—a decline as well as a fresh start, a diffusion as well as a humanisation of the 'power' of Comedy, less intense but not less enjoyable.

When Roman Comedy began, it was Menander, not Aristophanes, that served as the model. "Old Comedy", says H. J. Rose, "has found no precise imitators in modern literature,

for its form is too closely bound up with Athenian customs, especially religious, to be adopted as it stands into any country now existing".<sup>7</sup> In following Menander, however, Plautus aimed at more than mere mimicry. Plautine comedy aimed at presenting the seamy side of life, exposing current follies and foibles, but the stress was more on entertainment than on correction or edification. The characters were often no more than types — the cunning slave, the old libertine, the resourceful pimp, the reckless braggart, the gullible father, etc. His Pyrgopolynices has had his progeny (among others) in Ralph Roister and Captain Bobadil. The recurring theme was the labyrinth of folly into which 'love' led people young and old — the old even more than the young, and the 'gods' most of all. Plautus introduced music and song into his comedies, and the result was first-class entertainment, though the ostensible aim was the correction of social and civic abuses.

The other great Roman comedian, Terence, was born 55 years after Plautus; and, according to Gilbert Highet, "although less popular as a dramatist, was easier, politer, and more edifying".<sup>8</sup> Terence was more truly Menander's disciple than Plautus had been, and perhaps many of Terence's plays were but intelligent adaptations of Menander. But he humanised his characters still further, — they are men and women now, and not mere caricatures, — and he introduced a serious tone into his comedies. On the formal side, Terence gave the five-act structure to Comedy, and this persisted till much later.

The tradition of Plautus and Terence must have continued till Rome declined and the 'dark ages' descended on Europe. But the 'dark ages' comprised also the Age of Faith and the Age of Chivalry. Christianity gave a new meaning to 'love' — almost spiritualising it in the process — and the new ethics of chivalry gave a new dimension to the romantic literature of the Middle Ages. Romantic love involved, as C. S. Lewis has shown in *The Allegory of Love*, humility, courtesy, the religion of love, and adultery. But the emphasis shifted steadily from the evanescent outer aspect to the infinitudes of the spirit, from sensual gratification to spiritual realisation. The body — the physical aspect of love — is not ignored; it is even the starting-point.

<sup>7</sup> *Outlines of Classical Literature* (1959), p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> *The Classical Tradition* (1949), p. 120.

But there is the continual leap of transcendence from the physical to the spiritual, and this is the whole point and purpose of romantic love. Between the old Plautine Comedy, which was realistic, satirical, critical and farcical (in various proportions), and the new Romance, which took its cue from the idealistic tradition of the Arthurian legends and the *Song of Roland*, highlighted positive qualities like heroism, self-sacrifice, chivalry, and glorified a form of love that defied disappointment, scorn, defeat and even death, — between Comedy and Romance there yawned indeed an almost unbridgeable gulf. Comedy could be of the earth earthy, it wasn't squeamish about mixing talk of love with courtesans and the hucksterings of the market-place. But romantic love was becoming more and more a spiritual idea, and was striving towards a seemingly impossible ideal. It had no use for earth's 'weights and measures'; it would either bring the heavens down — or perish in the attempt. When Shakespeare started essaying Comedy, he had the indigenous Comedy, and the comedies of Lyly and Greene, before him; and he had the Latin plays of Plautus and Terence, which had been revived at Rome and Ferrara, and even in London.<sup>9</sup> And he had also his own innate romantic leanings, being a creature of the Renaissance, and a darling of the imagination. His problem now was how to fuse the spirit and form of Comedy — evolved by Plautus and Terence — with his own soul's need, the radiant spirit of Romance.

### III

#### THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

It is 'auspicious' to begin with *The Comedy of Errors*, for here, although the mist comes as if from nowhere, it also disappears as unaccountably. The hurts that chance causes, chance takes away as readily; and the 'errors' are annulled, and happiness is the word for all. Like *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Comedy of Errors* too has been a very 'popular'

<sup>9</sup>In 1527, Cardinal Wolsey had a performance of Plautus' *Menaechmi* at his York Place, and this was followed by one of the *Phormio* next year. (Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*. Vol. III. p. 20.)



play in India. Adaptations and translations are numerous. Abridged prose versions (usually Lamb's, but Proscruetised to the permissible vocabulary-range) are often prescribed for school reading in English. But the play itself has hardly ever been included in the college syllabus. At the M.A., of course, it is 'presumed' that all students have read all the plays (and poems) of Shakespeare.

Seen from one point of view, *The Errors* is an astonishing piece of cram: it is as though Shakespeare wished to put into this one basket all his gleanings in Classical Comedy. As T. W. Baldwin puts it,

"His (Shakespeare's) grammar-school training had been insistent that he must gather into notebook and mind materials out of which later to compile by imitation his own work. So here he assembles in his mind all accessible plays on mistaken identity; *Amphitruo*, *Menaechmi*, possibly *Miles*, and probably Gascoigne's translation from Ariosto as *Supposes*".<sup>10</sup>

Plautus' twins are now doubled, on the excellent principle "the more the merrier"; if we are in for the incredible, says Dowden, "let the incredible become a twofold incredibility, and it is none the worse".<sup>11</sup> So Shakespeare gives us 2 Antipholuses and 2 Dromios, the twin masters and the twin servants. The 'foundling' motif—going back to the *Oedipus* and the *Ion* and exploited by Menander and his Roman successors—comes handy, and Shakespeare brings to his treatment of this stale theme a splendid virtuosity. Aegeon is in search of his lost son (Antipholus of Ephesus) and his companion, Dromio; the Syracusan Antipholus and Dromio are in search of their long lost brothers (and also Aegeon); and Adriana sends the Ephesian Dromio to seek out and bring home to dinner the Ephesian Antipholus (her husband). This triangular chase is the start of the play. Once concede the Playfair's Axiom of this play that the 2 Antipholuses and the 2 Dromios look and dress and talk indistinguishably alike, the rest follow like the many propositions of Euclid. As the Syracusan brother puts it later (V. i. 385):

I see we still did meet each other's man,  
And I was ta'en for him, and he for me,  
And thereupon these ERRORS are arose.

<sup>10</sup> *Shakespeare's Five-Act Structure* (1947), p. 665.

<sup>11</sup> *Shakespeare: His Mind and Art*, p. 57.

In fact, excepting that the length of the play had to be kept within reasonable limits (a matter of 2 hours' commerce on the Elizabethan stage), there is no reason why the confusions could not have been quadrupled. Coleridge called *The Errors* "a legitimate farce in exactest consonance with the philosophical principles and character of farce". In a farce, though not in a comedy, "the story need not be probable, it is enough if it is possible". The play sups full of improbable possibilities, and many strange and ludicrous situations arise provoking mirthful laughter. In the end, not only the wife gets her husband back, and the brothers their brothers, and the father his sons, but the Antipholuses get back *both* mother and father. Aegeon gets his wife back, and the Syracusan Antipholus wins (a prize bonus, this!) a wife in the other Antipholus' sister-in-law, Luciana. All's well that ends so well.

The play begins with Aegeon's long retrospective narration, and we can see the strides made by Shakespeare in the management of blank verse by contrasting this speech with Prospero's similar long recital in *The Tempest*. ("In my beginning is my end"! ) As soon as Aegeon gains a few hours' respite to raise the money for ransom the 'errors' start enacting themselves. In I. ii, the wrong Dromio meets the Syracusan Antipholus just when he is recapitulating his predicament :

So I, to find a mother and a brother,  
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.

In II. i, Adriana concludes after a report from the Ephesian Dromio that she has lost her husband. In II. ii, even when his own Dromio meets the Syracusan Antipholus, the misunderstandings only multiply, and they are hurried off by Adriana to her house—and they are resigned to the inevitable in terms of Dromio's incredulous astonishment :

This is the fairy land. O spite of spite!  
We talk with goblins, owls and sprites.  
If we obey them not, this will ensue :  
They'll suck our breath, or pinch us black and blue.

In III. i. (the central scene), the Ephesian Antipholus and his Dromio find themselves locked out, for Adriana is entertaining the other Antipholus within. "The hilarious and crucial episode",

says Harold Brooks, "depends for its full impact upon the stage-arrangement: the parties in altercation are both plainly visible to the audience though not to each other".<sup>12</sup> It is for this episode that Shakespeare raided the *Amphitruo*, in which Jupiter in Amphitruo's absence takes Alcmena by coming to her in the disguise of her husband. Jupiter is decent enough to tell the injured husband that the fault hadn't been Alcmena's, since *she* didn't know about the deception at all. There is the parallel story in India of God Indra visiting Ahalya in the guise of her husband, Gautama; although guiltless herself like Alcmena, Ahalya is cursed by her husband to be turned to stone, and her release comes only when, as described in the *Ramayana*, Rama during his wanderings accidentally treads upon it and rehabilitates her again. Shakespeare was obviously tickled by Amphitruo's predicament and introduced it into his plot, though (as he did later in *Measure for Measure*) he avoided further unsavoury complications by making his Syracusan Antipholus fall in love, not with his brother's wife, but her sister Luciana, and so making it natural for him to resist Adriana's well-meant advances. Luciana is 'hit' too, but since she takes him to be her brother-in-law, she tries to hold herself back. But he has no need for any such scruples, and so he comes out with a romantic declaration:

Mine eye's clear eye, my dear heart's dearer heart,  
My food, my fortune, and my sweet hope's aim,  
My sole earth's heaven, and my heaven's claim.

In IV. i and the following scenes, the 'chain' episode gathers momentum. It is given by the goldsmith to the wrong Antipholus; when the Ephesian is arrested and sends for his purse, that too goes to the Syracusan Antipholus. Then we witness Adriana's hectic attempts to seize her Antipholus *twice* (not realising that there are two of them) and the magician's handiwork and subsequent discomfiture; and all roads in Ephesus suddenly lead to the Priory where (as in *Measure for Measure*, at the city gate) all complications are resolved and the threads are agreeably brought together into a new knot of love and understanding. It is commonly supposed that Shakespeare took over this part of the story from *Apollonius of Tyre*, in which

<sup>12</sup> *Early Shakespeare*, p. 61.

the husband recovers his wife in Diana's temple. Although H. B. Charlton thinks that Aegeon is "not so much a figure in the play as a prologue and an epilogue to it",<sup>13</sup> it cannot be gainsaid that the Aegeon-Aemilia story does much to raise *The Errors* from the level of mere farce.

In this early play, there are anticipations — first rough sketches — of some of the great things in the later plays. The Syracusan Dromio's words on Time (IV. ii.58) —

Time is a very bankrupt, and owes more than he's worth to season.  
Nay, he's a thief too : have you not heard men say  
That Time comes stealing on by night and day ?—

are a very crude foretaste of Ulysses' magnificent speech to Achilles in *Troilus* (III. iii. 145 ff). Again, Luciana's speech in derogation of the claims of 'liberty' (II. i. 15) —

Why, headstrong liberty is lash'd with woe.  
There's nothing situate under heaven's eye  
But hath his bound, in earth, in sea, in sky —

sounds like a vague first exercise carrying the germs of Ulysses' celebrated discourse on 'degree'. The Ephesian Antipholus behaves under provocation much as Malvolio does, when the clown talks to him in the guise of Sir Topas. Whereas Luciana says with concern, "Alas, how fiery and how sharp he looks", Maria says merely simulating surprise : "Lo, how hollow the fiend speaks within him !" (*TN*, III. iv. 86). When Adriana says : "I see two husbands, or mine eyes deceive me", she is in the same predicament as Orsino is in *Twelfth Night* (V. i. 208) :

One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons !  
A natural perspective, that is and is not.

Pinch the schoolmaster-magician has, like Cassius, a "lean and hungry look", but he is no tragic character, he is only a Carlylean caricature (V. i. 237) :

a hungry lean-fac'd villain,  
A mere anatomy, a mountebank,  
A threadbare juggler, and a fortune-teller,  
A needy, hollow-ey'd, sharp-looking wretch,  
A living dead man.

<sup>13</sup> *Shakespearian Comedy* (1938), p. 72.

Above all, this Ephesus — as it strikes the Syracusan brother (I. ii. 97) — could be an introduction to the Vienna of *Measure for Measure* :

They say this town is full of cozenage ;  
As, nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,  
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,  
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,  
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,  
And many such-like liberties of sin.

To read in *The Errors* any deep meaning beyond the fairly obvious — to read between the lines and discover any allegory or complicated symbolism — may not be very proper. Can we say that this is a serious artistic projection of the problem of appearance and reality ? or of the order-disorder theme ?<sup>14</sup> An Adriana behaving like Kannaki (in the Tamil epic, *Silappadhikaram*) in the face of her husband's errant behaviour would be a tragic figure, not a character in a 'comedy' of errors. To dismiss the play as mere entertainment is wrong ; but no less wide of the mark it would be to discuss it as a discourse on Shankara's 'Serpent and the Rope' (illusion and reality) or as a footnote to a cataclysm like the Trojan War.

*The Comedy of Errors* admirably conforms to the Classical 'unities' of Time and Place — though not, perhaps, of 'action' also (in the strict Aristotelian sense). As Alexander explains, the chance-meetings occur in the market-place on which open the doors of the house of Adriana (the Phoenix), the house of the courtesan (the Porpentine), and the Priory ; "one side entrance leads to the Bay, and the other to the Town".<sup>15</sup> If the Elizabethan stage had 5 exits or doors (as suggested by Chambers), the 'scene indivisible' could combine the unity of place with the suggestion of space unlimited.

In the discussions on Shakespeare's "small Latin and less Greek", *The Errors* usually figures as a link in the argument. It is based on two, and possibly three, of Plautus' plays ; and the English translations of these didn't appear till after Shakespeare's play was written. Although the conclusion is obvious, still some scholars argue that, after all, Shakespeare might have been

<sup>14</sup> See J. R. Brown, *Shakespeare and His Comedies*, pp. 128-9.

<sup>15</sup> *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, pp. 68-9.

acquainted with Warner's English rendering when it was in private circulation before its publication! But Percy Simpson is emphatic that Shakespeare must have used the Latin texts,<sup>16</sup> and Gilbert Highet also holds the same view and concludes that *The Errors* is really "Plautus romanticised", the Plautine themes being made the mere basis of the interlinked action on which Shakespeare reared a fabric of human emotion and sentiment and experience that is more of a drama than most of Plautus' comedies: "more carefully wrought, more finely characterised, more various, less funny but more moving, and, despite its naughtiness, nobler in moral tone".<sup>17</sup> Adriana is more than the nagging shrew, the virago and vixen of Plautus' play; Luciana is more than the traditional shadow or confidante of the 'heroine'; and the "gossips' feast" promised by the Abbess-Mother at the Priory is more than the conventional end of this budget of Errors — it is also the beginning of a new dispensation.

## IV

## THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

*The Taming of the Shrew* has also delighted readers in India, especially boys (though not girls to the same extent). As a boy I heard the story first from my mother, who knew no English but had read a Tamil prose version. Whether *The Shrew* was based on the earlier *A Shrew*, or both were based on a third source now lost, or whether *A Shrew* was no more than the 'bad quarto' of *The Shrew*, cannot now be settled to everybody's satisfaction; the problem seems to admit of a wide solution, though the 'bad quarto' hypothesis advanced by Alexander seems closer to probability than the other theories. As for the ultimate sources of both *A Shrew* and *The Shrew*, the hunt has so far proved fruitless, and Kenneth Muir lists *The Shrew* as one of the plays "of which the sources are not precisely known".<sup>18</sup> But Bullough, in his *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (Vol. I, 1957), has printed not only *A Shrew* but also a

<sup>16</sup> *Studies in Elizabethan Drama*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> *The Classical Tradition*, p. 215.

<sup>18</sup> *Shakespeare's Sources*, Vol. I, p. 258.

probable source for the Induction (S. Goulart's *Thresor d'Histoires Admirables et Memorables* as translated by Edward Grimeston) and *Supposes*, which was George Gaseoigne's version of Ariosto's Italian *I Suppositi*. The Induction may, after all, be traced back to the remotest antiquity, for there are old old tales current in India that speak of kings investing their menials — even the barber — with the luxuries and responsibilities of kingship for 24 hours, and enjoying the joke from a discreet distance. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which Shakespeare wrote not long after *The Shrew*, Puck (on Oberon's orders) elevates Bottom the weaver (after first 'translating' him) to the position of Titania's beloved, with a retinue of solicitous attendants. Comedy thrives on incongruity: whether it is a tinker promoted to lordship or a nobleman (like Lord Loam, in *The Admirable Crichton*) degraded to a kitchen-hand, the result is the same. For the Bianca-Lucentio episode, however, *The Supposes* provides a 'source', — if not a firm indication of borrowing, at least a 'suppose'. Master and servant exchanging roles, the tutor trying to teach more than his subject, the 'ad hoc' rich father who promotes a desired marriage, — all are stock motifs of comedy. Even as regards the Katherina-Petruchio story, it is but (as Alexander points out) "a version of one of the great themes of literature, a comic treatment of the perilous maiden theme, where the lady is death to any suitor who woos her except the hero, in whose hands her apparent vices turn to virtues".<sup>19</sup>

One unusual feature of *The Shrew* is the Induction. In several of Shakespeare's plays — *LLL*, *A Dream*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest* — there is a play (or a dramatic pageant) within the framework of the main play; and in *Hamlet*, there is a dumbshow in the play within the play. But here in *The Shrew*, the Induction is a mere outer envelope, while the play itself is the real thing; in the Induction, Shakespeare intended to do little more than revive — and give a habitation and a name to — his Warwickshire memories. The Folio version of *The Shrew* omits the tail-end of the Induction. At the play's beginning, the drunken Sly is taken to the Lord's house and made to believe against his belief that he is a lord indeed — with servingmen, attendants,

<sup>19</sup> *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 71.

Page (disguised as his 'madam wife'), and all. Then he sees a "pleasant comedy"—"a kind of history", the Page calls it—that is presented before him by the lord's players. At the end of the first scene he says, "'Tis a very excellent piece of work". But what happens to Sly at the end? From *A Shrew*, we learn that, as Sly falls asleep towards the end, he is conveyed to the alehouse again. Waking up in the morning, and on being reminded by the Tapster that his wife might curse him for keeping away at night, Sly answers grandly :

Will she? I know now how to tame a shrew,  
I dreamt upon it all this night till now,  
And thou hast wakt me out of the best dreame  
That ever I had in my life, but Ile to my  
Wife presently and tame her too  
And if she anger me.

There was a lesson to learn, and Sly has learnt it! Or, again, it might simply mean that Shakespeare intends that we should look upon the play as a mere 'escape', one of the best dreams that we have ever had in our lives.

In I. i, Lucentio and his man Tranio, on coming from Pisa to a public place at Padua, meet the sisters Katherina and Bianca, their father Baptista, and 2 suitors—Gremio and Hortensio—to Bianca. The father tells the suitors that not until Katherina—a vixenish thing, a "fiend of hell"—is married will he consider proposals for the marriage of Bianca. Lucentio falls at once in love with Bianca—"I burn, I pine, I perish", he tells Tranio—and master and servant "exchange habits"; it is decided that Tranio, passing for Lucentio, will queue up with the other wooers, while Lucentio will pose as a teacher and offer to instruct Bianca in Latin. In the next scene, Petruchio (with his Sancho, Grumio) comes as a god-sent answer to the problem posed in the previous scene: he will marry Katherina, shrew or not. In II. i, after seeing Katherina in one of her tempers, we witness Petruchio's bold wooing of her. He starts with the artillery bombardment of conceit and rhetoric, and the rapid exchange of stichomythia between them shows quickly enough that he will win. Even her striking him is in vain, for he tells her bluntly :



And will you, nill you, I will marry you...  
 For I am he am born to tame you, Kate,  
 And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate  
 Conformable as other household Kates.

Having got his point, he leaves for Venice after promising to be back on Sunday for the wedding. Now that this major interdict to Bianca's marriage has been removed, there is a bidding for her hand, and Tranio-Lucentio outbids Gremio. In III. i, we have an exhibition of the art of teaching music and teaching Latin—a piece of pure farce. In III. ii, after being kept in intolerable suspense till the last moment, Katherine (and her father) are relieved to find that Petruchio *has* come, though in fantastically "poor accoutrements"; and so the marriage takes place, and Kate is "madly mated" while Petruchio is properly "Kated". Almost at once they leave for Petruchio's country house, and Baptista's mind turns to the marriage of his other daughter.

In IV. i, at Petruchio's place, the blast-furnace works to effect the transformation of the shrew into the obedient wife. She is starved, she is kept awake; her defences are battered down. Petruchio hasn't much to learn from the contemporary technologists of brain-washing, but of course he does everything only "in reverend care of her". Charlton says that both the tamer and the tamed are "more like dwellers in a menagerie than in the polite world", but there is considerable finesse in Petruchio's apparently blunt ways, his effects are carefully calculated, his long-term strategy is an alteration between the *blitzkrieg* and the war of nerves.<sup>20</sup> In the 5 scenes of Act IV, we move between Petruchio's place and Padua, and in IV. v we shadow the connubial pair on their way back to Padua for a 'reunion'. At Padua things have been moving slowly in the meantime. Hortensio and Gremio are out of the picture, and a pedant has been found to deputise for Lucentio's father (Vincenzio) and reassure Bianca's father. But Vincenzio arrives unexpectedly, and is shut out of his son's house, (as the Ephesian Antipholus is shut out from *his*) by the substitute-father. Topsy-turvydom reigns for a while, Bianca marries Lucentio, and after a good deal of laborious explication the "jarring notes agree", and all is cleared. In

<sup>20</sup> *Shakespearean Comedy*, p. 98.

V. ii, the whole party — the parents, the parents-in-law, the brides, the grooms, as also Hortensio and the widow whom he has married — is gathered in Lucentio's house. Now comes the supreme test, which Petruchio proposes when the ladies have withdrawn :

Let's each one send unto his wife,  
And he whose wife is most obedient,  
To come at first when he doth send for her,  
Shall win the wager...

Bianca is sent for, but she is too busy ; the ex-widow is sent for, she thinks it is a joke and doesn't budge ; but when Katharina is sent for, she comes promptly, and she brings the others too. Such obedience, thinks Petruchio, means peace, and love, and quiet life. Asked to expound the doctrine of the divine right of husbands to rule their wives, Katharina strikes an attitude and makes her speech :

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,  
Thy head, thy sovereign ...  
Such duty as the subject owes the prince,  
Even such a woman oweth to her husband ;  
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,  
And not obedient to his honest will,  
What is she but a foul contending rebel  
And graceless traitor to her loving lord ? ...  
My mind hath been as big as one of yours,  
My heart as great, my reason haply more,  
To bandy word for word and frown for frown ;  
But now I see our lances are but straws,  
Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare...

Isn't she over-acting her part ? Or is she really — adroitly — speaking with the tongue in her cheek ? To take the speech at its face value is to view the play as an experiment in a laboratory followed by this formal announcement of the findings ; but *The Shrew* is not scientific demonstration but a comedy, almost a dream-sequence !

No doubt, even granting that *The Shrew* is a mere dream, there may be some logic behind it. Two methods of love-making are presented : the apparently bluff no-nonsense ruthless Petruchio way, and the way of calculations, subterfuges, and deceptions pursued by Gremio, Hortensio and Lucentio. The pattern of the plotting (as in the later *Much Ado*) is that of the hour-glass,

for the situation is suddenly reversed. When the play opens, the suitors are repelled by Katherina, while they all seem to dote on Bianca; but when the play closes, the husbands wish that their wives were as obedient as Katherina. The widow's is a marriage of convenience; Katherina's a marriage of compulsion; and only Bianca's has been a 'romantic' marriage. Which is the right basis for marriage? Which is the right way of wooing — Petruchio's or Lucentio's? Both? Neither? Do circumstances alter cases? Again: who is the better wife and the better woman, Bianca or Katherina? In Bianca there is no character-development, and perhaps none is needed. But Petruchio's shock-therapy has changed Katherina — as, in the very different world of tragedy, Lear is changed by the storm. Is Katherina merely humbled, her spirit wholly crushed, her head fully brain-washed, or is she only 'stooping' — ready to place her hands below her husband's foot — so that she may conquer again? In *The Errors* the complications arise because of mistaken identity; in *The Shrew*, from the character of the heroine and that of the hero. Could we therefore say with Bullough that *The Shrew* "shows that Shakespeare was already moving from the outer world of appearances and situation to the inner world of character and ethical implications"?<sup>21</sup>

Like the other early plays, *The Shrew* too contains seeds that sprout in the later plays. In the Induction, the Lord giving instructions that the players should be given welcome and "should want nothing that my house affords" calls to our minds Hamlet instructing Polonius to look after the 'tragedians of the city'. When Lucentio talks of his programme of studies in Padua, Tranio answers rather like Berowne in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Tranio says (I. i. 29):

while we do admire  
This virtue and this moral discipline,  
Let's be no Stoics nor no stocks, I pray.  
Or so devote to Aristotle's checks  
As Ovid be an outcast quite abjur'd.

And thus Berowne (*LLL*, I. i. 72):

all delights are vain; but that most vain  
Which, with pain purchas'd, doth inherit pain,

<sup>21</sup> *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. I, p. 68.

As painfully to pore upon a book  
To seek the light of truth . . .

Again, at Petruchio's bidding Katherina says that what they see is the sun, or the moon, or whatever *he* chooses to call it; likewise, to humour Hamlet, Polonius says that the cloud looks like a camel, a weasel, and also a whale. While Hamlet is trying to madden Polonius, the latter thinks that Hamlet *is* mad. Does Katherina also think that Petruchio is mad? Is she merely trying to humour him?

Critics like J. R. Brown and G. I. Duthie are apt to underline too heavily the ethical implications of *The Shrew*. Brown writes that the play "presents, in its own gay, hilarious way, a profound mystery" — "the mystery of Kate, that strange strength of woman which lies, or which seems to lie, in her weakness".<sup>22</sup> Duthie interprets the play in terms of the order-disorder hypothesis:

"According to the doctrine of correspondences, the relationship of husband to wife is the same as the relationship of king to subject, or of the head to the rest of the body. An insubordinate wife corresponds to a rebellious subject. We may take the hint and go further. The sin of Satan was that he rebelled against God: a rebellious wife is acting correspondingly to that".

Discord is the result of folly, and is the parent of horror: "it is the folly that Shakespeare stresses in comedy, the horror in the tragedy. But the attempts of Katherina and Macbeth to destroy order correspond".<sup>23</sup> All that needs to be said in the face of such strident emphasis is that, if the critics of yesterday were probably wrong to dismiss *The Shrew* as a mere trifle, almost unworthy of Shakespeare, some of our latter-day critics are "so simple" as to equate the meaning of *The Shrew* with that of *Macbeth*, and the cussedness of Kate with the primordial rebellion of Satan — which is *absurd*, as dear old Euclid might have snapped. They not only commit the mistake of taking the comedy too literally; they also read a lot between the lines, which only doubles the mistake, and concocts a new comedy of critical errors. It is enough to say that in *The Shrew*, as in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the theme is 'inner change' as a result of the

<sup>22</sup> *Shakespeare and His Comedies*, pp. 61, 98.

<sup>23</sup> *Shakespeare*, pp. 58-9.

pressures of actuality; Katherina, like Navarre and his friends, learns to leave immaturity behind and grow in wisdom and understanding.

## V

## THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

From the Two Ladies of Padua, it is natural to turn to the Two Gentlemen of Verona. This play too is listed by Kenneth Muir among the plays whose 'sources' cannot be precisely stated. The most probable source seems to be J. de Montemayor's *Diana Enamorada*. "Shakespeare may have known", Bullough speculates, "enough Spanish to read the original; there was also a French translation by Nicolas Collin (1578, 1587). He may have seen a manuscript copy of Bartholomew Yonge's English version. . . ." <sup>24</sup> In Montemayor's story, Felismena the girl in love disguises herself as a boy and follows her man, Don Felix, and finds him paying court to another lady, Celia. Felismena becomes Felix's own page, and is sent by him to plead his ease with Celia, who falls in love with her taking her to be the boy she seems to be (as Olivia falls in love with Cesario-Viola in *Twelfth Night*). Finding that her love is unrequited, Celia dies distraught; and Felismena has more trials in store for her — she has even to play the role of slayer of savages and warriors — before she can track down Felix and win his love back:

"The Shepherdess *Felismena*, who saw *Don Felix* so penitent for his passed misdeeds, and so affectionately returned to his first thoughts, with many teares told him, that she did pardon him, because the love, that she had ever borne him, would suffer her to do no lesse". <sup>25</sup>

The actual correspondences between the *Diana* story and *Verona* are not many, but some of them are crucial to the plotting of the play. Certain motifs — the girl following the man as his page, the woman playing the role of fighter and saviour — belong to the childhood of the race, and must have found various forms in story and drama. Shakespeare picked what he liked, and shaped them as his imagination directed him.

<sup>24</sup> *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. I, p. 206.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 252-3.

Other 'sources' printed by Bullough are the chapter on Titus and Gisippus in Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Governour*, extracts from Lyly's *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, a chapter from Sidney's *Arcadia*, and scenes from two plays, Scala's *Flavio Tradio* and the English version of the *Tragedia von Julio und Hyppolita*. The resigning of one's beloved in favour of a friend is the theme of the extract from Elyot, for Gisippus tells his friend Titus in the end: "Here I renounce to you clearly all my title and interest that I nowe have or mought have in that faire mayden". *Euphues*, of course, is full of sentiments and situations which Shakespeare adapted in this as well as other plays. The connection between *Verona* and the other 'sources' included by Bullough seems to be even more fortuitous, and it is unlikely that there was any conscious borrowing at all. But Bullough is right when he says that *Verona* "is a dramatic laboratory in which Shakespeare experimented with many of the ideas and devices which were to be his stock-in-trade and delight for years to come".<sup>26</sup>

While the 'unities' of Place and Time are given short shrift in the play, its action however is seen to have a basic simplicity that sustains the variety in scene and incident. First there is an exodus from Verona to Milan: in I. i, Valentine leaves, and in I. iii, Proteus is sent by his father to Milan; in II. vii, Julia (who loves Proteus) decides to leave for Milan too—thus, by the beginning of Act III Julia and both the Veronese gentlemen are in Milan. Already Proteus has transferred his 'love' from Julia to Silvia (who loves and is loved by Valentine), and made his criminal apostasy (II. vi). Nay more: he has betrayed to Silvia's father (the Duke) the intention of Valentine to elope with Silvia. This has led to Valentine's banishment and Proteus being asked to woo Silvia on behalf of Thurio (the Duke's choice for his daughter). Having by now got all his principal characters at Milan, Shakespeare begins to push them out of the city. Valentine, the first to come, is the first to go out, and he is chosen as their leader by the outlaws in the forest on the outskirts of Milan. Julia in boy's clothes has in the meantime become Proteus' page, and carries messages from him to Silvia (as Cesario does in *Twelfth Night*). With a view to escaping from both

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 210.

Thurio and Proteus, Silvia seeks Sir Eglamour's help, and they both quit Milan. Thus the new exodus is from Milan to the forest — first Valentine, then Silvia and Eglamour, and finally Proteus, Thurio, Julia, and the Duke. The errors of the two cities of Verona and Milan are to be set right in the forest. There is some quick pulling of the strings, and the way is cleared for the double marriage of Silvia and Valentine, and Julia and Proteus — "One feast, one house, one mutual happiness"!

Like the wood near Athens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, like the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, the forest near Milan too provides a proper background for the playing out of the drama of the lovers who are at cross purposes till sane solutions emerge at last. *Verona* in this respect is a first sketch for the fuller forest dramas of *A Dream* and *As You Like It*. From Verona to Milan, from Milan to the Forest: there is a neat double-shift in the scene of action. The time occupied may be a few days, or a week or two, but much less than in the *Diana* story. We need the passage of time for Valentine to learn to love, for Proteus to suffer a change in his love, for Valentine and Silvia to prove their loyalty to each other in spite of separation, and for Julia to show her great constancy, resourcefulness and perseverance in love. Thurio is used as a piece of convenient stage furniture throughout, and Sir Eglamour as something specially functional to be used at the appropriate time and cast aside. It was not considered 'proper' for a lady to saunter forth abroad unprotected: so Julia is habited as a boy, and, besides, it was vastly amusing on the Elizabethan stage for the boy who was playing the part of a girl to pretend to change into a boy again! When the exigencies of the plot require that Silvia should leave Milan too in search of Valentine, instead of making her also don a boy's clothes (which would be one girl too many disguised as a boy), Shakespeare makes her seek the help of the unexceptionable Sir Eglamour — as today a girl might use a bicycle or a car. If he runs away at the sight of the outlaws, it is no matter; the moment he has conveyed Silvia to the forest, he has nothing further to do. Thurio withdraws in a huff, Eglamour runs away; all is one.

Of the other characters, the Duke is only a little better than Juliet's father: Launce and Speed are rather more developed than Tranio, Grumio, and the Dromios, and in their subsequent

avatars they will prove as irresistible as Launcelot Gobbo, as inimitable as Dogberry, or as delightfully rascallionish as Autolycus. Silvia is as good as the song that she inspires (IV. ii) :

Holy, fair, and wise is she ;  
The heaven such grace did lend her,  
That she might admired be.

Proteus realises this when he says :

But Silvia is too fair, too true, too holy,  
To be corrupted with my worthless gifts.

Julia adds the qualities of heroic patience and perseverance as well, — a foretaste of Helena of *All's Well That Ends Well*. Valentine's action in surrendering Silvia to Proteus seems to give a twist to his character at the very end, while Proteus seems to be a downright cad most of the time. The title of the play seems to imply (though as a matter of fact Shakespeare was rather casual with regard to the naming of his Comedies) that the theme is Proteus and Valentine — the crisis in their friendship — and its resolution. The Gisippus-Titus story hints at part of the truth ; and the conclusion of the *Diana* story at the other part of the truth. Proteus has been false in friendship and false in love ; ' Kill Proteus ! ' would be a just enough scream of protest from another Beatrice witnessing such perfidy as Proteus'. But both his victims — Valentine and Julia — readily accept his repentance, forgive him, and accept him back. The chivalric code of the Middle Ages spelt out its own ideal of Romantic love, and its own ideal of friendship between man and man. Like the mystery of the shriving of one's sins at the confessional, there was this other mystery of the cleansing of all rusts by the acid test of *true* repentance. Valentine says simply (V. iv. 79) :

Who by repentance is not satisfied  
Is nor of heaven nor of earth, for these are pleas'd ;  
By penitence th' Eternal's wrath 's appeas'd.

It is right that Valentine should accept Proteus' surge of penitence and receive him back as a friend, but need he also surrender Silvia — as if she were no more than a piece of property — to Proteus ?

All that was mine in Silvia I give thee.



Commenting on this line (and discounting the theory that it might be an interpolation), Dowden wonders whether it was not spoken by Valentine "to test the loyalty of his professed repentant friend". Or, perhaps, there is a gap here, "originally occupied by speeches by Proteus and Silvia".<sup>27</sup> Julia's swooning, and the other quick developments, save the situation for all of them. Proteus makes a brazen-faced defence which makes it appear that his sin is but the sin of original Adam (V. iv. 110) :

O heaven, were man  
But constant, he were perfect! That one error  
Fills him with faults; makes him run through all th' sins :  
Inconstancy falls off ere it begins.

Perhaps, these 'conclusions' of Shakespeare's Comedies should not be seen too curiously under a critical microscope. "Pleasantness, rather than reason or truth to nature", says Martin Holmes, "must be allowed to govern the last few scenes and send the audiences away feeling satisfied, comfortable and ready to come again".<sup>28</sup>

The trouble with this play is that — whatever the Elizabethan audience might have done — we are constantly looking before and after, and asking for what is not. Either we recapitulate *The Errors* or *The Shrew*, or we anticipate *A Dream* or *Twelfth Night*. As Quiller-Couch says, in *Verona* "Shakespeare is feeling for character, for real men and women. Tricks no longer satisfy him. Yet the old tricks haunt him".<sup>29</sup> "Romance, and not comedy, has called the tune of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*", declares Charlton; "That is why its creatures bear so little resemblance to men of flesh and blood".<sup>30</sup> Shakespeare seems to have tested his strength most with the character of Julia — he had some idea to convey, some image of the Eternal Feminine to project — but he didn't quite succeed. The 'rejected' women (Julia, Helena and Hermia in *A Dream*, the other Helena of *All's Well*) have invariably a hard time of it to win their men back. In the world of love, as in the work-a-day world, nothing succeeds like success; yet a woman fighting for her rights

<sup>27</sup> *Shakespeare: His Mind and Art*, p. 58 fn.

<sup>28</sup> *Shakespeare's Public*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>29</sup> *Shakespeare's Workmanship* (1931), p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> *Shakespearian Comedy*, p. 43.

or stooping to conquer is an 'unwomanly woman', or a mere figure of fun! It is thus not easy to make a heroic heroine of a Julia or a Helena, though Shakespeare has surely done his best.

In this "very wardrobe of 'effects'" (Quiller-Couch's phrase), there are pieces Shakespeare used to better advantage in the later plays. Launce is good, but not as integral to the plot itself as a Bottom or a Dogberry. On the other hand, Launce and his dog, Crab, have won the appreciation of Shaw himself ("I laugh at them like a yokel myself"), while Harold F. Brooks (*Essays and Studies*, 1963) sees reflected in Crab, in comical and pathetic terms, the transgressor in Proteus — a parallelism that, not only indicates the tightness of the plotting of the play, but also anticipates the subtler parallelisms in the maturer plays to come. In I. ii, Lucetta on being asked repeats the names of Julia's gallants, thus prefiguring the scene in *The Merchant of Venice* (I. ii) in which Nerissa names the several suitors to Portia, while the latter makes devastating comments on them. Speed's — "though the chameleon Love can feed on the air, I am one nourish'd by my victuals, and would fain have meat" (II. i. 160) — becomes in the fulness of time Hamlet's (III. ii. 91) :

Excellent, i'faith: of the chameleon's dish. I eat the air, promise-cramm'd; you cannot feed capons so.

Silvia's (II. iv. 89) —

Nay, then, he should be blind; and, being blind,  
How could he see his way to seek out you? —

is bettered in Bassanio's (*MV*, III. ii. 123) —

But her eyes —  
How could he see to do them? Having made one.  
Methinks it should have power to steal both his.  
And leave itself unfurnish'd.

Proteus reveals Valentine's intentions to the Duke, as Helena is to reveal Hermia's intentions to Demetrius in *A Dream*. Valentine's predicament among the outlaws is to be repeated much later when Imogen finds herself among the 'outlaws' in *Cymbeline*. The conversation between Silvia and Julia (IV. iv. 135 ff) is in a musical key that is tuned again in *Twelfth Night* when Orsino questions Cesario about her supposed sister and

her lover. The same key, yet — what a difference — tuned by Shakespeare in the days of his perfect mastery of mood, music and atmosphere.

## VI

## LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST

In his Notes on the Comedies of Shakespeare, Coleridge says that "the characters of Berowne and Rosaline are evidently the preexistent state of his Beatrice and Benedick". After quoting the speech (V. ii. 829) beginning with —

Oft have I heard of you, my Lord Berowne,  
Before I saw you; and the world's large tongue  
Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks . . . —

Coleridge comments: "Here Rosaline rises up to the full height of Beatrice". While this is no doubt true, *Love's Labour's Lost* deserves also to be studied in its own sovereign right. Far from being considered (as was the fashion once) one of Shakespeare's earliest plays — if not the very first — *LLL* is now-a-days being pushed more and more towards the mature comedies. As a comedy, it is certainly *sui generis*: it is quite unlike *Verona*, *The Shrew* and *The Errors*, and also *A Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and the romantic comedies of Shakespeare's maturity. It is a play difficult to date and difficult to discuss, and it has resisted all attempts to track it down to its 'sources' — the *Sleuth's Labour's Lost* indeed. There are passages made up of awkward rhyming couplets, and there are passages of memorable poetry. Part of the play seems to be built round an idea, and part of it seems to be a Working Party consisting of pedants and self-deceivers. Don't the two parts make a whole? That is the main question.

Our difficulty may be due to the fact of revision some years after the first draft of the play was made. Just as in *Much Ado* (as we shall see later) the revision must have been with a view to high-lighting the Benedick-Beatrice theme, here too the revision must have been undertaken to give rather greater prominence than before to the Berowne-Rosaline theme. The play was

first written, probably in 1594, and was revised 3 or 4 years later. Contemporary allusions to both periods have been found. When, in 1593, Elizabeth's favourite, Walter Raleigh, suddenly fell from favour, memories were revived of his (and his friends') earlier trafficking with Giordano Bruno, Copernican astronomy, and 'atheism' generally. Raleigh's rivals — Essex and his party — wanted to make capital out of their enemy's fall. There had also been, perhaps, some slight to Essex or/and his sisters that had to be avenged. Southampton was of Essex's party, and Shakespeare was associated with him. Was it not most likely, then, that during the closure of the theatres on account of the plague Shakespeare should have got this play ready poking oblique fun at Raleigh and his circle, 'The School of Night', and got it produced at the house of a nobleman of Essex's party? Whether it was a partisan play or merely a comedy of witty dialogue, homespun Bankside humour, and vaulting romantic poetry, it was certainly first played before a select audience that could relish both the verbal fireworks and the shower of lyricism, both mark the darts of satire and catch the nuances of allusion. It must have been, says Martin Holmes, "an audience of wits and poets of the Court and its outskirts, an audience of men who made a point of conducting their lives and, when necessary, their death with a degree of conscious elegance epitomised to us today in that scholar, poet and soldier . . . whom Richard Carew summarised as . . . 'the miracle of our age, Sir Philip Sidney' ".<sup>31</sup>

The veiled attack on the Raleigh group was but part of the play's intention. Miss Frances A. Yates's *Study of Love's Labour's Lost* (1934), Miss M. C. Bradbrook's *The School of Night* (1936), the *New Arden* edition of the play and other inquiries of recent date have opened several collateral possibilities. It is obvious that so much of the play is devoted to linguistic vagaries and pedantries of all sorts. These entertain the audience, no doubt, but weren't there specific contemporary targets as well? One clue seems to be provided by John Eliot's *Ortho-Epica Gallica* (1593), ostensibly a French phrase-book but also intended as a satire against 'educationists' like Florio and Vives. In the same year was published Gabriel Harvey's *Pierces Supererogation* to which a reference is seen in *Holofernes* (IV. ii. 79):

<sup>31</sup> *Shakespeare's Public*, pp. 37-8.

"Master Person, quasi pers-one. And if one should be pierc'd, which is the one?" One thing provoked another, and the parties ranged themselves in verbal battle-array: the pedants, classicists and formalists (Florio, Harvey, Chapman) on the one side, and those who relied on experience, 'sanguine wit', and naturalness (Eliot, Nashe, Shakespeare himself) on the other.

A satire directed, partly against the School of Night, their alleged atheism, and their denial of natural life and the light of love; and partly against the School of Pedantry (another form of darkness), their verbal conceits and their absurd avoidance of healthy natural speech: so, indeed, we may read *Love's Labour's Lost*. The satire was aimed at certain contemporary 'tendencies' in thought and speech, for the cast of the one determined the cast of the other; and it was also directed against certain men who were popularly identified with those tendencies. Thus the fantastic Armado = Chapman, the author of *The Shadow of Night* (1594), = Raleigh, his patron. Again, a Spaniard named 'Armado' might have caused in 1594 the same amused derision as a character like Herr Blitz might have provoked in London soon after the collapse of Hitler's Germany, for Englishmen "can seldom take our perils seriously for long".<sup>32</sup> Another chain of equivalences would be Holofernes = Florio-cum-Vives = Chapman-cum-Harvey = Raleigh. To these chains, Richard David adds a further link (Moth = Nashe):

"The key to many of the interrelations of these two groups . . . is, I am sure, that elusive and engaging person Thomas Nashe. Just as Moth has an equivocal position in the play, attached to Armado and yet twitting him and Holofernes as openly as do the King and his lords, so Nashe shifted between the two parties in real life".<sup>33</sup>

Shakespeare's satire, then, was not only two-pronged, but became also a satire on the satire itself. He was laughing at what is laughable, but he was also laughing at the laughs. This could be called the nobler satire and the higher comedy.

While some logic can be inferred from the traditional division of the play into 5 Acts,<sup>34</sup> the fact that the last Act is almost as

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> Introduction to the *New Arden* edition, p. xlviii. Other parallels too have been suggested: Navarre = Southampton; Berowne & Rosaline = Shakespeare & his 'Dark Lady' (A. L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, pp. 214-5).

<sup>34</sup> John Vyvyan sees in *LLL* the Terentian five-act structure. See his *Shakespeare and the Rose of Love* (1960), Ch. II.

long as the first four put together raises the question whether the play as it now stands is what it was when it finally left Shakespeare's hands. There are repetitions (IV. iii and V. ii) of certain lines assigned to Berowne, and a repetition in II. i of the same Berowne-Rosaline exchanges; did Shakespeare forget to cancel a rejected draft, or did the compositor make a mistake? We shall never know for certain. In a sense, the scheme of the play is simplicity itself:

- I. Four men decide to keep away from women; but four women arrive all the same.
- II. Those four and these four meet, and Nature is not to be mocked. The men fall in love with the women; the latter are not indifferent.
- III. One of the four men 'breaks the ice' first, and sends a letter to his lady. (The others do the same, each thinking that he alone is the exception.)
- IV. All four stand exposed to one another; they have *all* broken faith. They decide to woo and win.
- V. But they woo in the wrong way, disguised as Muscovites, and are exposed. The women have the upper hand, and ask the men to wait for a whole year before they can hope to have their heart's desire.

If Navarre and his 3 Lords thus fall in love in spite of their oaths and seek marriage, Armado too falls in love with the country wench Jaquenetta in spite of himself, and does actually marry her at the end of the play. The main action and the ancillary action intersect and intertwine and finally become one action because, (1) Costard's liaison with Jaquenetta is the subject of the first complaint to the King under the 'new' dispensation; (2) Costard as the bearer of letters from Armado and Berowne delivers them to the wrong people and thereby mixes up the two actions; (3) the 'low-comedy' characters figure in the 'Nine Worthies' and bring together both lords and ladies in the community of shared amusement and laughter; and (4) Moth, as befits his name, is everywhere, and makes something out of even Dull. There is, indeed, a method in the madness of the happenings recorded in the play. In I. i, no sooner Navarre and his 3 noblemen (Dumain, Longaville and Berowne) have vowed to live a contemplative life for 3 years, than news is brought of the arrival of the Princess of France and her 3 ladies (Katharine, Maria, Rosaline) on an embassy. While the Lords realise that an exception will have to be made with regard to

these distinguished visitors, there is news from Armado that the rustic Costard had seduced the girl Jaquenetta. In I. ii, Armado realises that he is himself in love with the girl. After the collapse of the Lords' vows in Act II, every Jack of them has his Jill who will now give him no quiet. The business of the embassy recedes into the background having already fulfilled its function, — providing a reason for the prolongation of the ladies' stay in Navarre's Park. In III, which is usually central to a play, the only development (which is a double-event) that takes place is Costard's receiving Armado's letter to Jaquenetta and Berowne's to Rosaline, which paves the way for the further complications. Being an unlettered man, Costard delivers the letters wrongly — Armado's to Rosaline (IV. i) and Berowne's to Jaquenetta (IV. ii). In IV. iii, with the Park for a background, eavesdropping on an epidemic scale goes on : as Navarre reads aloud his declaration of love to the "queen of queens", Berowne overhears him ; when Longaville reads his sonnet to "sweet Maria, empress of my love", both Berowne and Navarre overhear him ; when Dumain reads his verses to Katharine, the other three overhear him. First Longaville advances to surprise Dumain, then Navarre advances to surprise both Longaville and Dumain, and last Berowne advances to charge all the other three with hypocrisy and apostasy. But now Jaquenetta comes with Berowne's letter to Rosaline, and so Berowne too stands self-exposed like his three friends. The stylisation in this scene contributes a good deal to the peculiar gaiety of the play. And the lovers add unconsciously to the gaiety and invite further discomfiture by avoiding the straight-forward course and resorting to subterfuges. They try to woo the ladies as Muscovites, and are hoist with their own petard. Self-deception fails ; disguise (another form of deception) fails more miserably still ; what remains ? They decide to make a clean breast of everything, and rely on the ladies' mercy. But, then, how are *they* to take these men seriously ? — men who have proved more changeable than the moon ! So they impose the 12-month penance. They could do no less. In *The Errors*, *The Shrew*, and *Verona*, the men had things more or less in the way they wanted it. Now it is the turn of the women. It is the women that have outwitted the men, and it is the women that have the final say in the matter. It is because the Princess charms and Rosaline scintillates,

it is because the four ladies (and especially Rosaline) are as clever as they are fair, as witty as they are wise, that *Love's Labour's Lost* incarnates for the first time the spirit of the Shakespearian Romantic Comedy.

While Charlton deplores the "formlessness and the spinelessness of the thing as a play", Granville-Barker sees 'style' as the essence, the very soul, of the play. The two themes are 'life' and 'language'. Buffon said that 'the style is the man', and it is as though Shakespeare is engaged in a demonstration of the truth of this dictum as it applies to a number of individuals. *Love's Labour's Lost* is also a kind of phrase-book (like Eliot's *Ortho-Epia*) that laughs us out of crankiness in behaviour and woolliness in speech or writing; hence, indirectly, it is also a guide to wise living and a guide to living speech. Although one of the court group, Berowne provides the antithesis to the official thesis; it is his own page, Moth, that provides the constant corrective to the extravagances of Armado in speech and behaviour. Costard and Dull counterbalance Holofernes and Nathaniel. Boyet, stationed with the ladies, anticipates the movements of the Navarre lords. Thus Nature fashions obscurely — yet effectively — its own system of cheeks and counter-cheeks. Night-watching, star-gazing, the pursuit of knowledge, all are permissible goals so long as they do not mean a flight from life; and life includes love, the affections, and the whole drama of 'this-worldliness'. Likewise, art or artistic language cannot run away from life, experience, and the whole drama of everyday intercourse. "Shakespeare's plea for life", says Frances Yates, "is a plea for the right kind of love, the rational love between the sexes".<sup>35</sup> Shakespeare's plea was also for the right kind of speech: rational but not lacking the embracing fluidity of love, easy and natural but not cheap and crude. As Hamlet tells the players (III. ii. 16): "... let your discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature". Learning is no mere adornment but something that tempers the quality of one's thought and feeling, and love is no mere distraction but a transforming experience that gives new eyes, new ears, and a new outlook on life (IV. iii. 323):

<sup>35</sup> *A Study of 'Love's Labour's Lost'*, p. 197.



But love, first learned in a lady's eyes,  
 Lives not alone immured in the brain,  
 But with the motion of all elements,  
 Courses as swift as thought in every power,  
 And gives to every power a double power,  
 Above their functions and their offices.

And when love gives new eyes, new ears, and a new zest in life  
 it will also guide the tongue to appropriate and adequate speech.

## VII

## A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Mistaken identity causes the confusions in *The Comedy of Errors*; in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Navarre and the three Lords make their protestations of love to the wrong Ladies, since they are masked and purposely flaunt the wrong tokens. Mistaken identity figures again in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In *The Shrew*, two lovers (Gremio and Tranio-Lucentio) make a bid for Bianca to her father; in *A Dream* too, Lysander makes a bid for Hermia to her father, putting forward his own claims as against those of his rival, Demetrius (I. i. 99):

I am, my lord, as well deriv'd as he.  
 As well possess'd; my love is more than his;  
 My fortunes every way as fairly rank'd,  
 If not with vantage, as Demetrius' . . .  
 Why should not I then prosecute my right?

The theme of multiple suitors for the same girl (Bianca, Silvia) is to be revived in *The Merchant of Venice*, but in *A Dream* (as in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) there is the hardly less interesting theme of two pairs of lovers moving at cross-purposes. In Verona, Proteus proves false to Julia when he pays his court to Silvia, who is already secretly affianced to his friend, Valentine. It is the shock of the happenings in the outlaws' place—the flight of Silvia, Proteus at the point of seizing her by force, the sudden interference by Valentine, Proteus' repentance, Valentine's 'magnanimous' offer, Julia's swooning—that sets matters right. In *A Dream*, read Helena for Julia, Demetrius for Proteus, Lysander for Valentine, and Hermia for Silvia, and the emotional

pattern is the same. Why is Shakespeare so soon repeating the same story? Is he not satisfied with the patterning of events in *Verona*, and must therefore try again in another milieu, or in interlinked divers planes of reality? Is *more* or *less* logic needed to make the drama of the lovers convincing? As a matter of fact, it is not logic — but fantasy — that holds sovereignty over Love's delectable realms. As Orsino says in *Twelfth Night* (1. i. 14) :

So full of shapes is fancy,  
That it alone is high fantastical.

It is not surprising that Shakespeare should return to the theme of love (and lovers) again and again. Love is indeed the great, perhaps the supreme, reality in our lives. Yet one is baffled when one tries to grasp its meaning, or study its working, or inquire into its aetiology. Bassanio (who is another Bachelor of Love, like Orsino) muses half-aloud (*MV*, III. ii. 63) :

Tell me where is fancy bred,  
Or in the heart or in the head,  
How begot, how nourished? . . .  
It is engend'ed in the eyes,  
With gazing fed . . .

For Adriana love is only something seen, and hence she can mistake the Syracusan Antipholus for her own husband. For Katherina 'the Shrew', love is something hammered into her as wifely obedience, for Petruchio (in Charlton's words) really "drags love out of heaven and brings it down to the earth. To the chivalrous, love is a state of worship; to him, it is a problem of wiving".<sup>36</sup> For Proteus, on the other hand, love is changeable with a new face; and, for Valentine, love is transferable to a friend. It is the women — Julia and Silvia — that are steadfast in love. In *Love's Labour's Lost* there is, to quote Charlton again, "talk of love . . . there is no dramatisation of its operation on life as a vital energy".<sup>37</sup> Navarre and the Lords fall in love in spite of themselves; yet all they do is to write letters or essay poetry. They attitudinise, they platitudinise; they disguise themselves, they compromise themselves. Only Browne's sparkle and

<sup>36</sup> *Shakespearian Comedy*, p. 98.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 101-2.

wit and scintillating rhetorical displays (provoked, partly by his comrades, and partly by Rosaline and the ladies) save love from being quite laughed out of court.

Shakespeare is at the end of a blind alley. He hasn't been able to pluck the heart of the mystery of love. There was the hint of romantic love in the Syracusan Antipholus' attraction for Luciana. Lucentio falls in love with Bianca at first sight and experiences disturbing symptoms. There is something deeply moving in Julia's single-minded love for Proteus. In *LLL*, however, we are still only in the School or Laboratory of Love — the 'lovers' are yet to venture into the open and brave the agonies and ecstasies of love. Shakespeare *knows* indeed that love is the central mystery, the splendorous revelation, — yet so far he has been unable to give it form, motion, and life, or laws and sanctions of its own. He will do it, for the first time, in *Romeo and Juliet*; but, in *A Dream*, he casts a longing look behind at the 'experiments' of the recent past, and gathers into one rounded knot the 'lessons' of those experiments. All love's manifestations — all love's vagaries, love's little ironies, love as poetry and dreaming and lunacy, love as prose and practicality and as the mere business of wiving — all are recapitulated and bodied forth in a variety of lovers ranging from the diminutive creatures of the upper air like Titania to down-to-the-earth realists like Bully Bottom. Some are time's laughing-stocks, some are the playthings of chance. "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" is Puck's comment on the confusions of the midsummer night; but, from the human end, Oberon and Titania too appear ridiculous enough. The technique Oberon handles to compel his Queen's submission is even more cruel than Petruchio's: for Petruchio only terrorises his wife to obedience, whereas Oberon makes Titania ridiculous for all time to come.

In *A Dream*, the Theseus-Hippolyta marriage provides the base and framework of the action. They have individually had their 'romantic' past; at their present age (in Hamlet's words: *III. iv. 69*),

The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,  
And waits upon the judgment.

They are now very sensible people, though enough of the old fire remains in them to ensure that their married life will not be

devoid of exciting moments. From the Titania-Oberon exchanges (II. i. 68 ff) —

Why art thou here,  
Come from the farthest sleep of India,  
But that, forsooth, the bouncing Amazon,  
Your buskin'd mistress and your warrior love,  
To Theseus must be wedded, and you come  
To give their bed joy and prosperity? . . .  
How canst thou thus, for shame, Titania,  
Glance at my credit with Hippolyta,  
Knowing I know thy love to Theseus? —

we learn that it is partly jealousy or jealous curiosity that has brought these royal denizens of the air to the vicinity of Athens. Through these cross-references,—Theseus-Hippolyta and Titania-Oberon, — two of the four 'actions' in the play are effectively linked up. There is, then, the story of the 4 young lovers : when the complaint against his daughter is preferred by Egeus (he has figured already as the Duke in *Verona* ; and he will reappear as Juliet's father, and as the irate Brabantio in *Othello*), Theseus tells Hermia that she must finally decide before the day of his own marriage whether she will agree to marry Demetrius or retire to a convent. Thus the tangle of the four lovers (Lysander-Hermia-Demetrius-Helena) is also linked up with the Theseus-Hippolyta theme. Finally, the 'play within the play', the 'interlude' *Pyramus and Thisbe*, is to be presented before the ducal couple by the 'rude mechanicals' of the town : this conveniently brings the 'low comedy' characters to the centre of stage, pushing Theseus and Hippolyta themselves to the back-stage. An Interlude is presented in celebration of three marriages ; the Interlude is a tragedy ; and the tragedy is so presented by Bottom and his fellows that there is but universal merriment. Thus the very categories of tragedy and comedy are jumbled beyond recognition. From above, Oberon and Titania bless the lovers with "bed joy and prosperity" ; from the back-stage, the lovers watch the play in progress ; and the hero's role in the latter is being played by Bottom, who is of the earth earthy no doubt, but who has but lately enjoyed the favours of Titania, the Queen of the Fairies. Where does the tragedy end, and the comedy begin ? Which is the appearance, and which is the reality ? Is life a tragedy or a comedy ? Are we to sorrow about

life's many ironies—are we to think and muse about the spectacle of life—or are we only to laugh and forget?

When Kenneth Muir, while discussing Shakespeare's sources, says that the poet "combined a variety of different sources in the texture of his verse",<sup>38</sup> he enunciates a truth that applies even to the plot and characterisation in a play like *A Dream*. Ovid, of course, and Apuleius; the Bible; Chaucer, Spenser, and perhaps Marlowe; North's Plutarch and Berners' *Huon of Bordeaux*; Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* and Thomas Cooper's *Thesarus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae*; Stratford memories; the opulence of folk-lore: Shakespeare might have laid all these under his debt. Although we see the Rose, and know that it has derived from the plant and the earth and the water and the manures and the Sun and the sky, still the exact genetics of the flower must defy unravelling. Of the 4 elements in the plot (Theseus-Hippolyta, Oberon-Titania, the lovers' dance of error, and the staging of the Interlude preceded by Bottom's 'translation'), we can trace an atom of one element to this source, and another atom to that; but, as Bullough feels constrained to admit, "no known source combines (all) these elements. Probably Shakespeare combined them himself".<sup>39</sup> Shakespeare took the legendary Theseus but reshaped him in the image of Romulus. The Pyramus-Thisbe story was available in many forms, including perhaps dramas now covered up by oblivion. (Bullough has printed the British Museum manuscript copy of a *Tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe*, but it is hardly likely that Shakespeare knew about it.) As for the assinine transformation of Bottom,—was it Apuleius that gave Shakespeare the idea? For his 4 lovers, Shakespeare need have gone no further than his own *Verona*. There remain the fairies: Shakespeare took the names of Oberon and Titania from *Huon of Bordeaux* and Ovid respectively, and 'Robin Goodfellow' from Reginald Scot, while the other names he probably just invented in a tell-tale manner. After all, fairies in Shakespeare's time, as Johnson said, were much in fashion. Of course, these denizens of the sky don't bring either airs from heaven or blasts from hell. When Oberon and Titania don't quarrel, all is well with the earth; they are even willing to promote human welfare according to

<sup>38</sup> *Shakespeare's Sources*, Vol. I, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. I, p. 368.

their lights, and to bless the marriage bed. But once they start quarrelling, the earth will have to be prepared for the worst (II. i. 88) :

the winds, piping to us in vain,  
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea  
Contagious fogs . . .  
And thorough this distemperature we see  
The seasons alter : hoary-headed frosts  
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose . . .  
The childing autumn, angry winter, change  
Their wonted liveries ; and the mazed world,  
By their increase, now knows not which is which.

Bottom at one end, the fairies at the other : there is variety indeed, the whole gamut from the extremely practical to the whimsically fantastical ; Shakespeare has shaken the 'elements' together to fuse into a work of art. We may, if we like, peer into the cunning joinery of the several episodes. Bottom's 'translation' links up the upper air and the earth. Puck with his juice links up the Titania-Bottom farce with the lovers' tangle. The wood near Athens is the laboratory where the experiments in falling in and falling out of love take place. There, too, Theseus declares that all 3 marriages shall be celebrated the same night, and so — in the final scene — the play and the Interlude achieve exquisite co-existence. The diverse notes of lyricism, caterwauling, and clowning are also orchestrated into a unity by making each part in its unique mode function with the naturalness appropriate to it. There is in the play the same variety, the same irresponsibility, the same illogicality, and the same tantalising finality that we associate with our most elusive, yet most cherished, dreams.

Of the characters, Theseus is a grave and gracious figure, almost the image of the perfect ruler. He is a warrior who has turned to the tasks of peace, a romantic who has become practical under the discipline of experience. His marriage to Hippolyta is dictated as much by love as by policy, for his heart is warm even as his intellect is clear. He is slow to pass harsh judgement on Hermia, but he is generous in his praise of the Interlude presented before him. He will take the will for the deed (V. i. 209) :

The best in this kind are but shadows ; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.

Theseus no doubt discounts the lovers' experiences as midsummer fancies. In his great speech (V. i. 7) —

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,  
Are of imagination all compact.  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;  
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.  
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven . . .  
Such tricks hath strong imagination —

Theseus enunciates, though only from his severely practical point of view, the dynamics of the comic idea. It is likely Shakespeare himself played the part of Theseus when it was first produced as a court performance, — he really seems to have liked 'serious' parts like Jacques, the Ghost in *Hamlet*, and perhaps Prospero as well.

Bottom unquestionably is the great triumph of the play. He is John Bull, he is Master Philistine, he is a British Marco Polo. Wherever he may be — even in Titania's arms — his self-assurance never leaves him. He is at home everywhere. During the rehearsal and after, he shows that he, not Peter Quince, is the 'soul' of the group. When his friends suddenly leave him, he is not in the least frightened but paces about singing to himself. When the fairies crowd about him, he issues appropriate commands and seems vastly to enjoy the situation. Bottom's desire to play a tyrant's part was probably Shakespeare's sly dig at Edward Alleyn, the chief tragedian of the Admiral's men; and in the Interlude itself Shakespeare "irreverently mimicked some of the phrases which rolled so sonorous over Alleyn's tongue".<sup>40</sup> The 'part' of Bottom was written for William Kempe, the principal comedian of the Chamberlain's men. This was an exquisite joke too.

Above all, the poetry of the play :

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine . . .  
(II. i. 249)

<sup>40</sup> G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare at Work : 1592-1603* (1933), p. 85.

We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,  
 Have with our needles created both one flower,  
 Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,  
 Both warbling of one song, both in one key;  
 As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds,  
 Had been incorporate. So we grew together,  
 Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,  
 But yet an union in partition.

(III. ii. 203)

But if one started to quote, there would be no end. "Strength and success, and a pure radiant pleasure", says Edgar I. Fripp, "glow through *A Midsummer Night's Dream*";<sup>41</sup> and the play was, perhaps, the first purely Shakespearian marvel to come out of the creative forge of the 'Man from Stratford'.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Shakespeare: Man and Artist* (1938). Vol. 1. p. 394.

<sup>42</sup> While Martin Holmes thinks that *A Dream* was presented at the time of the marriage of William Stanley, Earl of Derby, and other occasions too have been suggested, A. L. Rowse affirms (*William Shakespeare*, p. 205) that the play was really produced to grace the occasion of the marriage of the Countess of Southampton to Sir Thomas Heneage on 2 May 1594. The validity of Rowse's reasoning that the Queen could not have been present (whatever the occasion itself) because of I. i. 72ff — and that the lines refer to Southampton and not to the Queen — is rightly questioned by T. J. B. Spencer (*The Observer*, 6 October 1963).



## CHAPTER VI

### EARLY TRAGEDY

#### I

#### MORAL CAUSATION IN TRAGEDY

Shakespearian tragedy derives ultimately from Roman and Greek tragedy on the one hand, and the mediaeval religious spectacle of the Dance of Death on the other. Superficially, a tragedy is a dramatic presentation of 'crime' and 'punishment', working in a background of unpredictable chance and cataclysmic change. There are the powers of Ate and Nemesis hovering around, and although the gods are in heaven, all is *not* right with the world. Somchow — somewhere — somewhen — the settled order is disturbed, and there is the release of primordial forces which it becomes increasingly difficult to control. We read (or witness) a tragedy: our attention is gripped: and, suddenly, doubts assail us, and we pull the chain of interrogation. The moving train of aesthetic appreciation stops, and ethical inquiry starts. What is the 'crime'? Who are the 'guilty'? Is the 'punishment' adequate? Are the innocent punished along with the guilty? Is this 'rough' justice or 'poetic' justice? While witnessing a tragic spectacle, we neither see the reign of firm justice nor recognise any clear relation between 'crime' and 'punishment'. If there is a pattern of moral causation, it is rather blurred and hazy. Evidently our ready-made ideas about the reign of 'justice' need revision and fresh formulation. What is 'crime' exactly, and how is it linked up with 'sin'? There are the two parallel series of terms: crime, punishment, forgiving and sin, damnation, redemption. 'Sin' is the taint within, infecting the individual's mind and soul, and 'crime' is the

tainted action and its consequences to others and to the 'commonwealth' at large. Sin is more elemental than crime, yet only crime is legally punishable. The point is well urged by Isabella in *Measure for Measure* (V. i. 448):

For Angelo,  
His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,  
And must be buried but as an intent  
That perish'd by the way. Thoughts are no subjects;  
Intent but merely thoughts.

Although sin by itself is not punishable unless it is translated into act, to the sinner himself there can be no easy escape from the consequences of sin, even if it hasn't developed into a crime or should the crime remain undetected. In Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dmitri doesn't actually murder his father, he merely talks of killing him; Ivan doesn't even go so far as Dmitri, he merely removes himself from the scene, knowing his brother's intentions quite well; and Smerdyakov, the bastard brother, actually kills Papa Karamazov. And how about the pure Alyosha, the youngest brother? Is he obscurely guilty too? They are sinners all of them, though Smerdyakov is the actual criminal. Neither Dmitri nor Ivan can escape the consequences of his sinful thoughts, expressed or unexpressed, for the less overt the thought the more viperous are the pangs of remorse; and Ivan sinks under the emotional strain, and nervous frenzy overpowers him at last. In Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, on the other hand, Raskolnikoff the murderer of the old pawnbroker and her sister is driven by the pressure of remorse to surrender of his own accord to the police authorities. No punishment that may be meted out to him by organised society can equal the agony *within*, the corrosive feeling of failure and futility, the perceived abyss between the imperatives of logic and the impact of actuality. Smerdyakov kills his natural father, but he is torn by no 'inner struggle'; it is Ivan who is a prey to the insurrection within. Raskolnikoff suffers both within and without, his own 'genius' upbraids his 'mortal instruments', and society too will in due course take its revenge on his body. But it is obvious that the self-stimulated inner agony is far more excruciating than any punishment that society or authority can devise.

'Sin' is, indeed, more elemental than 'crime', for it is really crime in a seminal condition, crime run to its source. Sin rots the soul inwardly, but crime affects others as well, damaging or destroying them. In self-protection or as a matter of retaliation the 'others'—the victim, the victim's relations and friends, organized society, the state or the commonwealth—seek to 'punish' the criminal, often demanding an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Where the punishment is inflicted by the victim or by his immediate 'kith and kin', it takes the form of 'revenge'; where, however, society or the collectivity as a whole takes punitive action against the criminal, such action takes the colour of 'punishment'. Yet the sinner or the criminal himself is hardly affected by the punishment from outside, for physical punishment cannot touch or redeem the soul,—only remorse and repentance can. Macbeth sins by wanting to kill his own kinsman and king, his generous benefactor and unsuspecting guest; the actual killing of Duncan, which soon follows, translates the festering sin into a bloody crime. Before the actual killing and afterwards, Macbeth inhabits a Hell of his own creation. When Macduff kills him at last, 'punishment' may be said to have overtaken the criminal; but even so, how can this 'punishment' compare with the enormity of his first crime and its attendant crimes, or even with his own soul's travail from the first half-formed murderous thought to the final act of the tragedy before Birnam Wood? Since the real author of a crime is the flawed or sin-infected soul, it is not so much the body's torture or annihilation as the soul's awakening and regeneration than can really redeem it. Persistence in a career of sin (and crime) can lead only to the soul's damnation, for the wages of sin *is* death,—*spiritual* and not alone *physical* death. But sin or crime followed by sincere repentance will certainly redeem the soul, and, perhaps, instead of terrestrial punishment, there may be a forgiving and forgetting of the nightmarish past. Shall we say, then, that the terms sin, damnation and redemption are applicable when we view the person from the inside, and crime, punishment and forgiving are appropriate when we view him from the outside? There is a world within, and a world without; and each would appear to be governed by laws peculiar to itself. Nevertheless, the two worlds, however juxtaposed in terms of apparent contradiction, are ultimately one in essence.

There *must* be a principle of unity that governs them both, thereby defeating and exceeding the seeming dichotomy or division. What, then, is this principle of unity?

Order and harmony are the universal law, while disorder and discord are sudden unaccountable irruptions that seek to destroy the order and the harmony. For a time discord persists, and widening waves of disturbance ensue; only when the violence is spent (or has been mastered) can harmony return. The 'microcosm' is one with the 'macrocosm'; Cain is Abel's keeper, and we are all members of one another. Not only man in society, but man set in Nature also, enacts an integral relationship. But now and then there occurs this unpredictable invasion of disorder. Shall we call this invasion 'Evil', simply begging the question? There is evil lurking in Nature, there is evil active in the very environment sometimes, — and evil obscurely invades the heart of man and contaminates his soul. It is like the invisible bacillus that enters and multiplies in the human body, corrupting and rotting it in the process. For a time the invasion is hardly noticed. Only later, when the poisonous results are explosively evident, like the buboes or the pustules, does the shock of realisation come to us. The assault of evil on man makes him sin, and when it blazes up in action, it shocks the world as crime. Now the crime can in its turn infect others with the parent sin, and so evil cunningly fabricates its own vicious circle, — crime and more crime, — a crescendo of horror piled upon horror.

Is Evil, then, without a beginning, and therefore without an end? Is it the dark magic of Maya — is it no more than a temporary mist that clouds the human vision for a time, to disappear presently, revealing the clear Sun of Truth — and Felicity? But these are metaphysical speculations, and are out of place here. Inhabiting as we do an Euclidean world, we are easily daunted by the fierce play of the dualities, we are susceptible to pain, we are conscious of the dark currents of evil in the field of human thought and action. So long as the higher knowledge that can alone pierce the dualities and touch transcendence is denied to us, we shall continue to traffic with such terms as sin, damnation and redemption, crime, punishment and forgiving. Even so, easy judgements are not possible. A crime — an evil act — has been committed: where, or on whom, shall

we pin the responsibility? The criminal prompted by his flawed soul might have done the deed; but who, or what, tainted the soul itself in the first instance? Was he self-prompted, was he egged on by his wife, or was he susceptible to 'supernatural' soliciting? Had evil somehow gained surreptitious entry into the Brahmah Casket of his heart—or was evil a very constituent of the atmosphere, unavoidably inhaled along with the oxygen, and so infecting the mind, heart and soul?

One thing, however, is clear. The neat categories that rule police court proceedings have little relevance to the world projected by tragic drama. One of the grandest achievements of all time, Aeschylus' trilogy, the *Oresteia*, is in substance a study of crime and punishment. A crime is an evil act born of sin; and punishment takes the shape of infliction of proportionate suffering on the evil-doer, such infliction being itself an evil act. But two spurts of evil action do not neatly cancel out each other; they only help to build up a fearful pile of cumulative evil achievement. Pelops' two sons—Atreus and Thyestes—work out in their own and in their children's lives the full malignancy of an ancestral curse. Thyestes the younger brother seduces Atreus' wife, Aethra, and steals the Golden Lamb which Pan had given only to the elder brother, the true king. Atreus retaliates by killing Thyestes' children and serving their cooked bodies for the unknowing father to feast upon. 'Punishment' has clearly exceeded the 'crime'. The thread of crime and punishment (or injury and revenge) is now taken up by the next generation. Both Atreus and Thyestes are dead. Agamemnon, Atreus' son, is campaigning near Troy (having earlier sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia, to Artemis at Aulis) to recover Helen and restore Greek prestige. During his 12 years' absence from Argos, Aegisthus, Thyestes' surviving son, seduces Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon's wife; and on the very day of his return to his city of Argos after the successful conclusion of the Trojan war, wife and paramour murder Agamemnon in his own palace. This is the theme of the *Agamemnon*, the first play in the Oresteian trilogy. One of the absolutely unforgettable, one of the terribly haunting, things in literature is Cassandra's prophetic speech in front of Agamemnon's palace at Argos. Once a Trojan princess and beloved of Apollo, but now Agamemnon's captive, Cassandra sees in a flash the past, the present, and the future; her

voice towers above the Chorus of the Argive Elders, and Clytaemnestra herself is forgotten for a few minutes :

Apollo ! Apollo !  
 Troy-builder ! Destroyer of me !  
 Ha ! What is here ? What roof ?  
 Whither hast thou brought me " . . .<sup>1</sup>

Lulled into a false sense of security by Clytaemnestra's consummate flatteries, Agamemnon enters his palace walking upon the purple carpet spread before him. Cassandra, left behind in his chariot, *smells* murder, and all the murders of the House of Atreus, past, present and future. She *sees* them, she experiences the agony, she screams out her despair :

Nay, but a hideous den, abhorred of Heaven ;  
 Guilt-stained with strangled lives, with kinsmen's blood ;  
 A place of sprinkled gore, of clotted horror . . .  
 Yea ! There, there, there ! Here's evidence enough !  
 Smell ? Nay - I see ; I hear them ! Little children  
 Whose throats are cut, still wailing of their murder,  
 And the roast of flesh, a father tasted - swallowed !

And she *sees* her own imminent death as well :

this human lioness, couching with a wolf  
 While the noble lion was away, will kill  
 Me unfortunate, a fair prize, to make  
 One more ingredient to her chalice of bane.  
 Sharpening her husband's death-knife, she declares  
 My death, too, shall requite his bringing me.

Clytaemnestra has avenged her daughter Iphigenia's death and Aegisthus has scored a double victory by seizing both Agamemnon's queen and throne, and he reigns as the tyrant of Argos for some years. In the next play of the trilogy, the *Choephoroe*, Agamemnon's son, Orestes, commanded by Apollo, returns to Argos in the company of Pylades, his bosom friend. He meets his sister, Electra, and together they vow to avenge their father's death. First Aegisthus, then Clytaemnestra herself, are done to death. Even Clytaemnestra's despairing appeal —

O son, forbear ! O child, respect and pity  
 This breast, whereat thou often, soothed to slumber,  
 Drainedst with baby mouth the bounteous milk ! —

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Campbell's translation.

doesn't save her ; Pylades reminds Orestes of the god's command, and so he hesitates no more, and she pays the penalty for killing her husband. But Orestes' triumph is short-lived. Clytaemnestra is imperious and terrible even in death, and her Ghost invokes the Furies to give chase to Orestes. Seeing these hideous spectres, Orestes cries distraught :

O Lord Apollo ! There ! What multitudes !  
 Their eyes drop down with hate and loveless blood . . .  
 They are on me ! They pursue me forth. I go.

He precipitately flees from the ' hideous den ' at Argos to Apollo's temple at Delphi.

In the third play of the trilogy, the *Eumenides*, both the exhausted fugitive and the vengeful Furies are discovered in the temple of Athene at Athens. The Council of the Areopagus debates the issue between Apollo (who defends Orestes' action and is determined to save him) and the Furies who are thirsting for the mother-murderer's blood. What a chronicle of crime and punishment (or revenge) : brother against brother's honour ; brother's heavy hand against brother's innocent children ; father deceitfully sacrificing daughter ; wife against husband, son against mother, mother's ghost against son ! Orestes has killed his mother at the express command of Apollo ; even so it is a crime, and has to be expiated. When after the debate the Elders of the Areopagus vote, it is found that there is a tie ; but Pallas Athene, as President, gives her casting vote in favour of Orestes, and he is accordingly acquitted. The Furies themselves are now willing to be transformed into the Eumenides, and Orestes the matricide is purified through suffering and remorse, and emerges out of the ordeal a new man, with his face set towards the future. Orestes is finally presented, not as the destroyer of his race, but verily as its saviour ; if as a matricide he ends the chapter of crimes, as a saviour he humbly inaugurates the chapter of peace and hope. The *Oresteia* is now seen to comprehend more than the fortunes of the House of Atreus, more than even the struggle between Apollo and the Furies. What profoundly moves us is Athena's forceful pleading with the Furies, her pleading with them and *changing* them, till at last they are Furies no more, terrible and terribly just, but the Eumenides, gracious and capable

of pity. It is Aeschylus' vision of a new world struggling to be born, and almost a foretaste of the Christian ethic.

## II

## PRE-SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

European tragedy had its origins in Hellas, and achieved for the first time a naked and fierce power of articulation in the *Oresteia*, still the supreme exemplum of 'tragedy' marked by purity and simplicity, an awful majesty, and a phenomenal concentration of power. Besides the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus's other extant plays too—notably *Prometheus Bound* and *The Seven Against Thebes*—give abundant proof of the penetrating clarity of his soul's vision and the unmistakable apocalyptic *elan* of his poetic utterance. Again and again he realised superhuman figures in human terms, and he invested his human figures with a Titan's passion and power. His Furies are not abstractions, they are only the stings and arrows of a very human conscience acquiring innumerable fearful shapes and devising innumerable fearful tortures. The heroes and heroines—Eteocles and Orestes, Electra and Antigone, Cassandra and Clytemnestra—are drawn firmly and boldly. But the stage is really our own heart, where the issue between presumptuous man and all-powerful destiny is fought over and over again; and we seem to see that the good man is also the religious man, that pity and morals are interchangeable terms, and that the gods are mighty but also just.

In his notes on Tragedy, Aristotle called 'plot' the soul of drama, and singled out the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles for special praise on account of the subtle symmetry of its tragic catastrophe. Directed by the Delphic Oracle, Oedipus decides to discover and banish the murderer of Laius, the former King of Thebes, and so rid the city of the plague that is raging. When his advice is sought, Tiresias the blind prophet first advises Oedipus to drop the investigation, then being provoked denounces Oedipus himself as the guilty man. Oedipus likewise quarrels also with his trusted adviser, Kreon. The evidence of the Corinthian shepherd opens Jocasta's eyes, and she runs to her apartment and hangs herself. Then comes the Herdsman and reveals



the double truth — that Oedipus is son to Laius and Jocasta, and also the murderer of Laius. Now Oedipus too knows the whole horror of his position, and rushes into the palace and blinds himself. Re-entering the stage, he bemoans his lot and meekly accepts the sentence of banishment. The misfortunes of the House of Laius are as moving (though not quite as horrible) as those of the House of Atreus. Oedipus' sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, kill one another. Their uncle, Kreon, drives their sister, Antigone, to suicide, and indirectly causes the death of his own son, Haimon. In the *Ajax*, the hero is unhinged through disappointment, kills innocent sheep, and then takes his own life. Philoctetes' is another painful story. Sophocles is accordingly often called a pessimist, but he might have answered that he was only presenting life as he found it — having seen life unflinchingly and seen it whole. Actually, Sophocles' art as a Tragedian — the singular consistency of tone in his plays and the harmony and sweetness of his poetic utterance — produces on us an effect that is other than despair. Even the *Oedipus Tyrannus* isn't merely depressing. "It is not the wanton malice of Fate", says C. E. Vaughan, "it is the passions which follow each other, wave after wave, beating on the heart of Oedipus and finally breaking it in pieces, that form the real subject of this tragedy".<sup>2</sup> Our concern now is not with 'morals' in any narrow sense of the term, but with the person and personality of Oedipus, for always Sophoclean tragedy raises the dignity of man. As the Chorus declares in *Antigone* :

Many a wonder lives and moves, but the wonder of all is man.

If the resourceful Oedipus who defeats the Sphinx and gives peace and prosperity to Thebes is the thesis, and the blinded, beggared, banished Oedipus is the anti-thesis, then the synthesis is the Oedipus who rises to the full height of his ineradicable humanity and imperious majesty at Coloneus, the Oedipus who is welcomed and accepted by the gods themselves. Oedipus, Antigone, Ajax, Philoctetes and the rest are apparently the play-things of chance or of the gods; but they are not insignificant people. There is a grandeur even in their defeat or death. Man suffers because he is great of soul — he is capable of feeling —

<sup>2</sup> *Types of Tragic Drama*, p. 45.

and he is keenly alive to his imperfections ; the greater he is, the more he suffers, because only then he realises most keenly the extent of his shortcomings. In his last great play, the *Oedipus Coloneus*, a mellowed yet characteristically Sophoclean symphony, he attempted in poetic terms to justify Man to men. There was no need to justify the gods to men ; the gods were just, always and eternally just. It is Man that stands in need of justification to his fellow-men so that hope and faith and prudence may take the place of despair and doubt and folly. While belonging to the old Hellenic world like Aeschylus, Sophocles was also conscious of the undertones of new dissidence, but he was careful to harmonise these with the traditional notes in his tragic symphonies.

Euripides, who was Sophocles' younger contemporary, took several significant strides towards the New World. Two ages as it were met in him, sometimes in antipathy, sometimes in fruitful collaboration. If he was the last of the Ancients, he was also the first of the Moderns. When he started writing, he felt that notwithstanding the continued popularity of Aeschylus and Sophocles, Tragedy should adjust its form and temper its spirit to meet the challenges of the new age. Euripides' was a keen and quick intelligence, his poetic sensibility was generally acute, and his art comprehended extremes of passion and behaviour, and being born a romantic in a classical age, he was a tireless and restless experimenter, a seeker of new effects on the stage and new values in life. He saw that what had so far been the corner-stone of Greek tragedy — the popular religion — no more enjoyed an absolute vogue. Doubt — scepticism — cynicism — reared up their heads, and neither the gods nor the legendary heroes inspired unquestioning reverence or awe. The stateliness, the serenity, the mellifluous sweetness of the verse, the intricacy and structural beauty of the design, the subtle symmetry of the tragic catastrophes, all fell rather flat on an audience that had learned to value excitement, variety, a quickening tempo, and an assertion of unashamed humanity. On the form side, Euripides found the Chorus a nuisance and did his best to minimise its importance. In his tragedies, the Choruses play no special role of their own, and their songs are but agreeable superfluities. On the other hand, Euripides introduced the merely informative Prologue and the providential accident — the *deus ex machina*

—that solves complications in a trice. He loved stage-effects too,—in this, perhaps, merely following the public taste. He also emphasised nakedly material details like Agamemnon tearing his letters to pieces or Xuthus glaring with wine-flushed cheeks. As Prosser Hall Frye remarked in his essay on 'Romance and Tragedy' (1922),

"Euripides is not very unlike Ibsen. Like the latter he too is unmistakably decadent and obsessed by the nightmare of ugliness . . . the heroic has ceased to exist; . . . for the tragic emotion of horror he substitutes disgust; for the moral qualm of his predecessors a shrinking of the flesh, a sense of physical repugnance and nausea".

His themes were unconventional: Medea kills her children to spite her husband; Phaedra falls in love with her step-son and, on being repulsed, encompasses his death; Hercules kills his wife and children; Pentheus is torn to pieces by his wife and mother. Euripides' 'realism' was often but a means to achieve specific 'romantic' effects. Nevertheless, Euripides too was a titanic force in Tragedy: versatile and original, responsive to the currents of contemporary thought and feeling, gifted with a heart that beat in sympathy with the world's pain, he widened the horizons of Tragedy, forged fresh links between art and life, and bore the trials that rebels and pathfinders are destined to bear. But seen from another point of view, he certainly debased the pure gold of Attic Tragedy.

Centuries after Euripides came Seneca. Whether the tragedian was identical with the Seneca who was the infamous Nero's tutor and counsellor and the author of the several prose works on stoic philosophy is apparently an open question still. Seneca the tragedian was certainly intimately acquainted with Attic Tragedy, but his exemplar was Euripides. *Medea*, *Hercules Furens*, *Phoenissae*, *Troades* and *Phaedra* were all Senecan versions of Euripidean themes. The *Oedipus* and the *Agamemnon*, however, were attempts to Romanise Sophocles and Aeschylus, but evidently Seneca was ill at ease with these great pure masters of Tragedy. It is also likely that Seneca wrote his plays, not for public presentation before a mighty concourse of people, but for private recitation or declamation before a select sophisticated audience of friends, connoisseurs and classicists. The 'horror' element is underlined in Seneca's plays even more than in Euripides'. In the *Medea*, the tigress-heroine kills her own children, not behind

the stage as in Euripedes, but in full view of the terror-stricken and abject Jason. In the *Thyestes*, again, the murdered children's heads are supposed to be served in a dish to the father; and, likewise, in every play of his, Seneca ensures that the air should be thick with the smell of blood and the fumes of violence. It is thus difficult to believe that Seneca expected his tragedies to be acted in all their native ferocity. For, even though many of the murderous events take place off-stage and are only described by Messengers (as in Greek Tragedy), there is enough of residual violent action in his tragedies to shock and scandalise an audience should any attempt be made at realistic presentation. It would be a very different matter if the plays were only declaimed by trained speakers.

Specialising in a particular form of Tragedy, the Revenge Play, Seneca sought to render more of the horror and little of the sublimity or ethical import or sheer poetic iridescence of Aeschylean or Sophoclean tragedy. The key to the Senecan Revenge Play lies in this dictum from his own *Thyestes* :

Nothing avenges crimes  
But what surpasses them.

Seneca's particular contribution was a deliberate heightening of the horror, partly through the elimination of high ethical motives, partly through the exploitation of dramatic devices like the Ghost and the Fury, and partly by means of weird romantic touches all over the play. Seneca had also an unflinching eye for striking dramatic situations, his metrical mastery was astonishingly perfect, and his epigrammatic terseness gave even his sententious sayings an individual glow. No wonder that, when Europe awakened after the deep sleep of the Middle Ages — the 'dark' ages — it was Seneca who inspired to creative effort Italian tragedians like Giraldi and Ludovico, French tragedians like Jodelle and Garnier, and English tragedians like Kyd and the youthful Shakespeare.

Born in faith, nurtured in poetry, and tested and tempered by philosophic doubt, Greek Tragedy even at its highest altitudes and in its deepest abysses kept touch with actuality and glowed with a paramount sense of existential relevance and urgency. Writing of Greek Tragedy in *Among My Books*, the late Frederick Harrison remarked :

"Whatever the exact meaning of Aristotle's definition of the function of tragedy that it was 'to purify the soul by pity and terror', the sense of it is, to rouse the spirit and cleanse it from all that is sordid, selfish, torpid and mean by touching our human sympathies to the quick, by calling forth the dormant feelings of interest in our fellowmen, of pain at their sufferings, of enthusiasm in their heroism; to stir the worldly contented spirit, fattened by comfort, ease and enjoyment, to a consciousness of the tremendous issues of good and evil with which human life is surrounded; to force the dull soul to see Retribution dogging the steps of injustice and crime and Ruin standing beside Prosperity and self-glorification--just as Death stands beside the rich and prosperous man in some mediaeval Dance of Death".

Greek tragedy at its characteristic best was the rhythm of words revealing the deeper reality, what T. S. Eliot calls "the unity of concrete and abstract in philosophy, the unity of thought and feeling, action and speculation, in life"; but, adds Eliot, "in the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it".<sup>3</sup> But there had to be a Seneca too in the history of tragic drama.

Fifteen hundred years passed, and Seneca's plays appeared in English from 1559 onwards, and the complete Seneca appeared as *Tenue Tragedies* in 1581. "English Seneca read by candle-light", wrote Thomas Nashe, "yields many good sentences as 'Blood is a beggar' and so forth". Between these two dates, 1559 and 1581, appeared *Gorboduc* (1562), *Jocasta* (1566), and *Gismond of Salerne* (1667). The indigenous mediaeval drama--the tradition of the Miracle and Morality plays--lingered on still, and tried to effect a marriage with the growingly popular Senecan tragedy. After uneasy compromises, something like a satisfactory synthesis was achieved. "One great secret of the Elizabethan synthesis", says A. P. Rossiter, "lay in the thoroughness of the co-action between the mediaeval layers and the new: predominantly, the Senecan and Italian".<sup>4</sup> Kyd was Seneca's most successful pupil, and in his *The Spanish Tragedy* (1589) achieved both firm character-drawing and a plot worthy of a modern detective story. He was "greater than he knew", says Percy Simpson, and his work "was an inspiration to a master-mind". And even aside from the province of the Revenge

<sup>3</sup> *Selected Essays*, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> *English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans* (1950), p. 162.

Play, the University Wits — and following them, Shakespeare — were to attempt the co-existence of Seneca (as seen through contemporary Italian eyes) and the native tradition of inclusiveness of apparently diverse modes. "This was to be the English way", comments Rossiter: "the immensely vital English stock, though strengthened *verbally* by 'climbing to the height of Seneca his style', retained its irresistible humour and the urge for 'notable morality' — in a more inclusive sense than Sidney meant in writing those words".<sup>5</sup> And so to Shakespeare, and his first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*.

## III

*TITUS ANDRONICUS*

We needn't go into the disputed question of the 'authorship' of *Titus Andronicus*. The Folio included it, and Meres had earlier mentioned it: while there is an obvious crudity about the play, it is not difficult to imagine a youthful Shakespeare writing it as a first essay in Tragedy. "He was a beginner at the beginning of English tragedy", says Alexander, "and he had to make what he could of it".<sup>6</sup> Titus Andronicus, the Roman General, has lost 21 out of his 25 sons while waging war against the barbarian Goths. Returning victorious to Rome with Tamora the Queen of the Goths and her 3 sons as captives, he sacrifices her eldest son, Alarbus, so that the 'shadows' of his own dead sons may be appeased. This opening, it has been noticed, has a marked resemblance to the *Troades* of Seneca, where the young innocent Astyanax is likewise sacrificed. Tamora makes an impassioned appeal to Titus (I. i. 105):

Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed.  
A mother's tears in passion for her son:  
And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,  
O, think my son to be as dear to me . . .  
O, if to fight for king and commonweal  
Were piety in thine, it is in these.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 136. See also Wolfgang Clemen, *English Tragedy Before Shakespeare* (1961: English translation by T. S. Dorsch), pp. 288 ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 77.

Andronicus, stain not thy tomb with blood.  
 Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods?  
 Draw near them then in being merciful.

The verse halts, but the meaning is clear: the claims of mercy are being set up against the harsh imperatives of revenge. But her appeal falls on deaf ears. Scarcely Alarbus is carried away by Titus' sons than Demetrius, one of her surviving sons, urges Tamora to sharp revenge to "quit the bloody wrongs upon her foes" (I.i.141). A conspiracy of circumstances favours the execution of her sinister plans for revenge. With Rome literally at his feet, Titus divests himself of all power (rather like Lear) and helps Saturninus (the elder son of the late Emperor) to election as Emperor, besides promising him the hand of his daughter, Lavinia. This is really sowing "the dragon's teeth of tragedy", for things begin to go wrong almost immediately afterwards. Bassianus (the late Emperor's younger son) carries away Lavinia with the support of Titus' sons, and in a sudden access of rage the old man kills his own son, Mutius. An eye for an eye, a son for a son! Meantime Tamora bewitches Saturninus, and he decides to make her his Queen, while she advises him to lie low and patch up some sort of peace with Titus and his family.

By surrendering his power, Titus has already placed Saturninus (and Tamora) in a position of vantage; by inviting them to a hunting party, Titus gives a further opportunity to his enemies to do evil. The forest gives sufficient cover for the execution of the nefarious designs of Tamora and of her paramour, the blackamoor Aaron. Between them they plan and successfully execute a multiple revenge, which is really a multiple crime. Tamora's 2 sons, Demetrius and Chiron, murder Bassianus in her presence, and Aaron so arranges matters that Titus' sons, Quintus and Martius, are charged with the crime and sentenced to death. Concurrently with the murder of Bassianus, Tamora's sons have also criminally possessed Lavinia, and cut off her hands and tongue lest she should reveal the identity of the culprits. In III.i Titus, with his mind in torment because of his daughter's fate and the sentence on his sons, is tricked by Aaron into cutting off his left arm in the fond, but futile, hope of saving his 2 condemned sons; and his sole surviving son, Lucius, is banished from Rome. Titus' isolation is complete, and his

chalice of misery is full. Marcus, Tribune of the people and Titus' brother, enumerates the wrongs suffered by the old General (III. i. 255):

See thy two sons' heads,  
Thy warlike hand, thy mangled daughter here ;  
Thy other banish'd son with this dear sight  
Struck pale and bloodless ; and thy brother, I,  
Even like a stony image, cold and numb.

It is the Nadir of the fortunes of the Andronici, but it is also the turning point. Before taking leave of his father, Lucius vows that he will avenge his father's wrongs by raising a power with the Goths.

It is now Titus' turn too to act. He determines to banish mere tears and find his way to "Revenge's cave". The sight of the severed heads of his dead sons and the severed hands of his living daughter kindles thoughts of bloody revenge, and he knows that he can

never come to bliss  
Till all these mischiefs be return'd again  
Even in their throats that have committed them.

In III. ii we see the swift transition from this enraged Titus to a Titus moody and apathetic. Like the sight of the Bedlam Beggar in *Lear*, the killing of a mere fly makes Titus muse by way of protest (III. ii. 60):

'But!' How if that fly had a father and mother ?  
How would he hang his slender gilded wings  
And buzz lamenting doings in the air !  
Poor harmless fly,  
That with his pretty buzzing melody  
Came here to make us merry ! And thou hast kill'd him.

After an unspecified interval, Lavinia reveals (IV. i) the names of her seducers by guiding with her mouth and stumps a stick on a sandy spot. Knowing the worst, Titus and Marcus take the oath

That we will prosecute, by good advice,  
Mortal revenge upon these traitorous Goths,  
And see their blood or die with this reproach.



In IV. ii, there is a development that threatens a split in the enemy's camp. Tamora is brought to bed of "a joyless, dismal, black and sorrowful issue", and lest it should make public their liaison she desires that Aaron should "christen it with thy dagger's point". There is some altercation between Aaron and the Nurse and Tamora's sons, and Aaron kills the nurse and carries away his child, hoping to save it somehow. Soon afterwards, there is news of Lucius approaching Rome with an army, and Tamora persuades Saturninus to allow her to appease Titus (IV. iv. 89) :

for know thou, Emperor,  
I will enchant the old Andronicus  
With words more sweet, and yet more dangerous,  
Than baits to fish or honey-stalks to sheep,  
When as the one is wounded with the bait,  
The other rotted with delicious feed.

The very imagery is prophetic. While she has her ingenious plan to trap Titus and his son, Aaron is captured with his baby in the course of their intended flight and brought to Lucius. Hoping to save his child, Aaron promises to speak of things to Lucius' advantage (V. i. 63) :

For I must talk of murders, rapes, and massacres,  
Acts of black night, abominable deeds,  
Complots of mischief, treason, villainies,  
Ruthful to hear, yet piteously perform'd.

In V. ii, Tamora appears with her sons before Titus, hoping to make him believe that she is Revenge and her sons, Rape and Murder. But the situation is turned in his own favour by Titus, for he finds means to separate the mother from the sons and then to kill the latter with a relinment of brutality. At the ensuing feast at Titus' place to which Saturninus and Tamora, and also Lucius and Marcus, are invited, Titus like a cook serves Tamora a pie baked out of her sons' flesh, and she 'daintily' feeds on it, "eating the flesh she herself hath bred". He also kills his own daughter, Lavinia, so that her shame and his should die together. He stabs Tamora too, and Saturninus stabs Titus ; and Lucius stabs Saturninus. The blood-bath is concluded, and Lucius is hailed as the new Emperor of Rome. 'Rough' justice

is accomplished at last, but Evil as personated by Aaron is defiant till the very end, for all he can say is (V. iii. 185) :

I am no baby, I, that with base prayers  
I should repent the evils I have done ;  
Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did  
Would I perform, if I might have my will  
If one good deed in all my life I did,  
I do repent it from my very soul.

A 'brave punishment' is devised for him : he is to be set breast-deep in earth and famished to death. Tamora's carcass is to be thrown forth "to beasts and birds to prey".

Besides the sacrifice of Alarbus at the opening of the play, other Senecan touches are the cooking of Chiron and Demetrius (as in the *Thyestes*), the scene of the murder of Bassianus (as in the *Hercules Furens*), and Titus' funeral speech (I. i. 150-6) which seems to be an echo of a speech in the *Thyestes*.<sup>7</sup> Titus and Hecuba seem to think almost alike —

In peace and honour rest you here, my sons . . .  
Secure from worldly chances and mishaps !  
Here lurks no treason, here no envy swells . . .  
No noise, but silence and eternal sleep . . .

Happy Priam ! Free fares he to the deep land of spirits, nor ever will bear on his conquered neck the yoke of the Grecians . . .

and to hope alike, though both are soon to be overwhelmed by fresh calamities, he the loss of more of his sons and the rape and mutilation of his daughter, and she the double sacrifice of her daughter and grandson. Lavinia losing her tongue glances at the Ovidian story of Philomela. In IV. i, Young Lucius gives Lavinia Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, who turns the leaves 'busily', and Titus asks her :

Lavinia, shall I read ?  
This is the tragic tale of Philomel  
And treats of Tereus' treason and his rape . . .  
Lavinia, wert thou thus surpris'd, sweet girl,  
Ravish'd and wrong'd as Philomela was,  
Fore'd in the ruthless, vast, and gloomy woods ?

<sup>7</sup> Percy Simpson, *Studies in Elizabethan Drama*, p. 49 ; F. L. Lucas, *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy* (1922), p. 118.

For the Aaron story, the analogue suggested is a *Bandello* novella in which a Moorish slave kills his master's wife, makes him cut off his nose promising to spare his sons, but breaks the promise all the same. It has also been urged by Ralph M. Sargent (*Studies in Philology*, 1949) that Shakespeare might have taken the main lines of the 'fable' from a prose version of the history of Titus Andronicus, though the drama is a much more tightened piece of work and Shakespeare's Aaron, when we compare him with the Moor of the prose version or the slave of the novella, is a far more diabolical figure anticipating creatures of pure malignity like Richard Crookback, Don John, Iago, and Edmund. Another important change too has been noted by J. C. Maxwell: the play shows in the first and the fifth Act the typical Shakespearian concern "with civil order and the forces which threaten to overthrow it".<sup>8</sup> Tillyard also notes that "*Titus* is rich in political doctrine... *Titus Andronicus* begins with a dispute about the succession... The high political theme, that of the wounds of civil war and their cure, recurs at the end of the play".<sup>9</sup> After quoting Marcus' speech (V. iii. 67ff) with its reference to 'tempestuous gusts' and 'broken limbs', Tillyard makes the apt comment: "The tempests of the air duplicate the commotions of the commonwealth, and the commonwealth is figured in the anatomy of a man".<sup>10</sup>

It is often stated as a cardinal fact of Shakespeare's tragic world that, generally speaking, man is himself largely the architect of his own destiny, and if he sins or goes astray or ruins himself, it is not because forces altogether beyond his control are ranged against him. Always, it is said, Shakespeare's heroes are betrayed by what is false within. This is an oversimplification of the dynamics of moral causation in Shakespearian tragedy, for not seldom are people 'betrayed' by what is 'good' in them as well. The start of the tragic action in *Titus* is the sacrificing of Tamora's eldest son. If here Titus yields to the clamour of his sons and his own desire that the 'shadows' of his dead sons should be propitiated by the blood of the enemy, his next crucial action — divesting himself of all power — is certainly born of his stern heroic nature, his capacity for selfless action. But while

<sup>8</sup> Introduction to the *New Arden* edition of the play, p. xxxvii.

<sup>9</sup> *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 139.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 140.

we applaud the magnanimous gesture, we deplore the results. A hero like Titus is neither a paragon of perfection nor an essay in imperfection. He has striking qualities, some noble, some barbaric. We cannot argue that, had he *not* sacrificed Tamora's son in the first instance, she would have played the dove and would not have embarked on a career of viciousness and crime. But, on the whole, Shakespeare has been at pains to show how the hero's misfortunes have some relation to his own errors of commission and omission. On the other hand, even granted that some of Titus' actions were ethically wrong, there is no recognisable equivalence between the wrong actions and the terrible consequences. It is, perhaps, wrong to talk of precise volitional actions and proportionate results. Tragic action is more like the plight of a trapped animal, but of an animal that can think and feel. John S. Smart, in his classic essay on Tragedy, writes :

“Tragedy involves reaction against calamity. The character who has been caught in the fatal snare struggles to escape, seeks to break through the net which is gathering about him ; or, if the effort is unavailing, there is at least a reaction in the mind itself. There is a sense of wonder . . . The stricken individual marvels why his lot should be so different from that of others ; what is his position among men ; and what is the position of man in the universe . . . It is the presence of this haunting sense of mystery that makes *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* such great and representative tragedies”.<sup>11</sup>

Granted all Titus' wrong actions, he still affects us profoundly as a Titan force, a man who can act heroically and suffer greatly, a man in whom, however the ‘elements’ may be mixed, the positive outweighs the negative. Although it is but Shakespeare's first sketch in Tragedy, although the shadow of Seneca — or of the shadow of the supposed image of Seneca moulded by his Italian disciples — blurs its intention, in *Titus* could still be seen the germs of Lear's self-wrought isolation, Othello's grave naivete, and Hamlet's ambiguous madness. Just as *The Comedy of Errors* could be described as a piece of cram that comprises a diversity of comic motifs, *Titus Andronicus* too is a piece of cram in which Shakespeare has assembled with a young man's assiduity and enthusiasm all the elements that he could think of as material for tragic drama. War with the Goths : disputed succession in Rome : rivalry in love : blood sacrifice : adultery : rape : murder :

<sup>11</sup> *Essays and Studies*, Vol. VIII (1922).

mutilation : double-dealing : sadistic cruelty : madness : impersonation : ' blood-bath ' : . . . all come into the picture. Banished Lucius seeking help from the Goths anticipates Malcolm seeking help in England, or Coriolanus making friends with the Volscians and marching on Rome. Tamora's plan to use Titus to win over his son, Lucius, appears later in the transfigured scene of Volumnia pleading with her son in *Coriolanus*. The unnatural alliance between Tamora and Saturninus is likewise transfigured into a story of grand passion in *Antony and Cleopatra*. There is in Lavinia's tongueless condition a pathetic helplessness that distantly foreshadows the mad (or maddened) Ophelia's prattle before she accidentally drowns herself. The psychology of the Roman mob and of the Tribunes that plays so important a part in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* is already hinted at in *Titus*. The rapidity of the killing of Lavinia, Tamora, Titus and Saturninus while a ' feast ' is in progress is re-enacted in the violent deaths of Gertrude, Claudius, Laertes and Hamlet during the ' friendly ' fencing match. *Titus*, indeed, is thus full of the see-saw of surprise and the shock of violence, but just fails to produce the ' Kathartic ' effect that is the prerogative of tragic drama. Concluding his admirable introduction to the *New Arden* edition of the play, J. C. Maxwell makes an important point :

" And even if the things in *Titus* which look forward to the later tragedies derive most of their interest from what becomes of them in those tragedies, they have some impressiveness in their inchoate state. *Romeo and Juliet* is on almost every count a vastly superior play to *Titus*, but it could be maintained that *Titus* is strictly speaking more promising. The author of *Romeo and Juliet* could conceivably have gone in that play as far as he was destined to go in tragedy—and indeed Shakespeare's tragic development does not exactly proceed through *Romeo and Juliet*—but the author of *Titus* was obviously going *somewhere* ".

Be that as it may, considered merely as a study of ' crime ' and ' punishment ', *Titus* achieves such a steady accumulation of horror that the overwhelmed reader (or playgoer) cannot but draw the inference that reprisal is no cure for crime, that what is gained through violence is apt to be lost through even greater violence, that crime criminally countered but breeds more crime, and that so long as there is no ' change of heart ' the chapter of crime will never really end. At the end of *Titus*, most of the Andronici are dead, and the whole brood of Tamora as well.

The sole surviving son of Titus, Lucius, has come with the backing of the Goths to restore order all round, — like a Richmond in *Richard III*, or like Edgar in *King Lear*. The chapter of crimes is ended, and it is his role 'to heal Rome's harms and wipe away her woe'.

## IV

## ROMEO AND JULIET

Before writing *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare had essayed (if we exclude the Histories) two different types of Tragedy — *Titus*, and the 'interlude', *Pyramus and Thisbe*, played before the married couples in *A Dream*. *Titus*, as we have just seen, has a manifoldness and massiveness more characteristic of Shakespeare's later tragedies like *Hamlet* and *Lear*. It is poor in poetry and characterisation, but not in variety, amplitude or sheer constructional skill. But, although there is some casual talk about 'love', more often it is lust and sordid calculation that drive the evil-doers to action. In *A Dream*, Theseus laughs at the lovers' fancies, and he would himself balance love with stern commonsense. Oberon, rather like a modern husband who 'plants' evidence of his wife's infidelity to facilitate easy divorce, organises Titania's discomfiture to achieve his own particular end. And 'romantic' love in *Pyramus and Thisbe* is a sudden development that erupts and consumes the lovers. It is easier to laugh at romantic love as a folly — to dismiss it as a dream — than take it seriously. Only too often are lovers apt to deceive themselves, being unable to distinguish a passing fancy from the genuine experience of love. One false note can ruin the symphony, one false word can destroy the faith. Shakespeare has so far only skirmished with the theme, — or played with it, — or laughed at it, — or even ridiculed it; in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare at last dares the great mystery. He chooses what may be called an 'extreme case'. The hero and heroine are hardly more than boy and girl, and they are children of two warring Veronese families. The city itself is often in the grip of the fever of family feud, street brawls, and civic commotion.

The Duke is a feckless person who can only make well-meant speeches. All attendant circumstances — the antecedents of the families, the character of the friends and advisers, the play of chance, the very atmosphere — are against the lovers. Yet the great miracle happens, Romeo and Juliet leap to their fate, consummate their love in a delirious night of ardour and agony, separate the next morning, and unite again only in the tomb of the Capulets. Better dead together than live in a world that will not allow them to love.

Shakespeare took his plot and most of his characters and often even the ideas for the dialogues from Arthur Brooke's long meandering poem, *The Tragick History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562). He might have also seen the prose version in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1567). Other possible sources — French and Italian — have been listed by scholars and researchers, but commonsense tells us that, for Shakespeare himself, Brooke's poem was probably all he needed. The play is rather shorter than the poem, since — although they both run to a little over 3000 lines — Brooke's lines are longer than the Shakspearian five-foot iambic lines. The main change is the change from the narrative to the dramatic mode; in other words, the action in the play has a swiftness, a precipitancy almost, which is foreign to the narrative (and, let us add, everyday life). In Brooke, the wooing of Romeus is spread over some weeks; in the play, Juliet is seen, wooed, and won the same night. In the poem, the killing of Tybalt takes place several weeks after the secret marriage; in the play, about an hour afterwards. In the poem, Paris woos Juliet some 3 months after Tybalt's death; in the play, the very next day. Between the wooing and the day appointed for the wedding there is an interval of some weeks; in the play, there is hardly any interval. This love has come as a blaze of revelation to Romeo and Juliet, and it consumes them also as a raging fire. In her Shakespeare Association Lecture (1930), Caroline F. E. Spurgeon elaborated the following thesis:

"In *Romeo and Juliet* the beauty and ardour of young love is seen by Shakespeare as the irradiating glory of sunlight and starlight in a dark world. The dominating image is *light*, every form and manifestation of it; the sun, moon, stars, fire, lightning, the flash of gunpowder, and the reflected light of beauty and of love; while by contrast we have night, darkness, clouds, rain, mist, and smoke".

When Juliet appears at the window on the night of the ball, in Romeo's eyes she is a sudden glory, she is the sun rising in the east; her eyes are "two of the fairest stars in all the heaven", and the brightness of her cheeks would shame even those stars! They start talking, she tries to warn him, but as if sensing fatality he says (II. ii. 77):

My life were better ended by their hate  
Than death prorogued wanting of thy love.

The tide that bears them aloft makes them a little dizzy, a little uncertain, a little even afraid. In I. v. 92, Romeo had approached her reverently as a pilgrim would a 'shrine'; hardly thirty minutes have passed, and she calls him "the god of my idolatry". Is it possible? The joy is too sudden and too great to be borne, and it almost frightens Juliet:

Although I joy in thee,  
I have no joy of this contract tonight:  
It is too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden;  
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be  
Ere one can say 'It lightens'.

And in the last scene, just before Romeo drinks the potion, he returns as if by a repetition-compulsion to the imagery of light (V. iii. 84):

A grave? O no! A lantern, . . .  
For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes  
This vault a feasting presence full of light . . .  
How oft when men are at the point of death  
Have they been merry! Which their keepers call  
A lightning before death. O, how may I  
Call this a lightning? O my love! my wife!

When she wakes up and finds that Romeo is dead, she has not a moment's hesitation. As long as Romeo was alive and she had hopes of joining him, she was prepared to take counsel with the Friar. Now she knows what she can hope for, and what she must do. Hadn't she anticipated it all when, on the day she had married him, she had also feared she might lose him (III. ii. 20):



Come, gentle night, come, loving black-brow'd night,  
 Give me my Romeo; and, when he shall die,  
 Take him and cut him out in little stars,  
 And he will make the face of heaven so fine  
 That all the world will be in love with night,  
 And pay no worship to the garish sun.

Much better be dead with Romeo than even join "a sisterhood of holy nuns" (V.iii.157). Romeo has made death bright as heaven, and it is life — "the garish sun" — that is stale and weary. "Romeo and Juliet stellify each other", remarks M. M. Mahood, "the love which appears to be quenched as easily as a spark is extinguished is, in fact, made as permanent as the sun and stars when it is set out of the range of time".<sup>12</sup>

The house of tragedy has many chambers: some are murkier and far more oppressive than some others, and when we pass from *Titus* to *Romeo and Juliet* we seem to be moving from one of the darkest to one of the brightest. At the same time, there can be no question about the poignancy of the tragedy of the young lovers who meet and fall in love on a Sunday night, marry on Monday afternoon, and find themselves separated on Tuesday morning; on Wednesday morning the wife is taken to be dead and buried, and on Thursday morning husband and wife achieve reunion by beyonding both life and death. Because they loved each other, Romeo and Juliet could at the last extremity look upon death itself as an illumination, a column of fire "stellifying" each other and transporting them to Paradisal Rose, the Rose of God. But there have been other deaths too — Mercutio's, Tybalt's, Paris'. Almost alone among Shakespeare's tragedies, in *Romeo and Juliet* the catastrophe is not brought into some sort of causal relation with a 'flaw' or 'vicious mole' in either the hero or the heroine. Critics who have tried to discover 'moral faults' or 'tragic errors' in Romeo and Juliet have only succeeded in reducing the Aristotelean or Bradleyan theory of tragedy to an absurdity. While calling the lovers foolish, hasty and precipitous, Irving Ribner judiciously adds that "to speak of a 'tragic flaw' in either of them is absurd... They seek always after good. They are not deliberate or even unknowing sinners".<sup>13</sup> In his essay on 'Shakespeare and Love', Middleton

<sup>12</sup> *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (1957), p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> *Patterns in Shakespearean Tragedy* (1960), p. 28.

Murry says that "it is only the tempest of circumstance which wrecks the life of Romeo and Juliet. . . . They are the victims not of their passion but of crass casualty; they are fortune's fools, not their own". George I. Duthie writes that "the troubles of Romeo and Juliet come upon them as a result of external circumstances. It cannot be said that they themselves are to blame for their fate".<sup>14</sup> John Lawlor offers a tortuous explanation of the tragedy:

"The real significance of 'character' in such a drama is not in terms of 'flaws', nor in any more general emphasis upon the causal connection (as the 'impetuosity' of the lovers in *Romeo and Juliet*). It is rather in the intensity of contrast between initial immaturity and the prenatality forced upon the protagonists. . . . The 'ripeness' or readiness, especially as it is manifest between fellow-sufferers in the bond of love, is all. If that tie holds, Death is robbed of the greater glory; the ending is triumph, a transcending the limits of mortality by holding fast, in a union of suffering, to what is best in the mortal condition".<sup>15</sup>

One final quotation, this from J. E. Crofts:

"It is not Romeo who is hasty but love; it is not he who is at fault but the world. The tragic impression left upon our minds is not that this young man was unable to cope with this particular set of circumstances, but something more general: that in a world gone sick with futile animosities and vulgar ambitions love itself lies a-bleeding".<sup>16</sup>

We cannot, then, blame the lovers for what overtakes them. They are neither sinners nor criminals. Shall we then throw the blame on 'Fortune'—on pure mischance? This will not do either. There is no doubt some miscalculation on the Friar's part, and it is the accident of Friar John's being put in quarantine that prevents the delivery of the letter to Romeo. But mere mischance is not the key to the tragedy. Duthie holds 'external circumstances' responsible for the tragedy, while Crofts says succinctly that it is the 'world' that is sick and is at fault. It is true that, as Lawlor points out, the lovers suddenly outgrow immaturity and accept the responsibilities of prenatality; and since they cannot live, they go forth and meet their destiny; and by boldly embracing death they outsoar Death's finality.

<sup>14</sup> *Shakespeare*, pp. 186-7.

<sup>15</sup> *Early Shakespeare* (Ed. by J. R. Brown and B. Harris), p. 139.

<sup>16</sup> Introduction to the *Warwick Shakespeare* edition, p. xxvi.

Given the situation, they wisely prefer to die ; but this doesn't in any way exonerate the agents responsible for the situation. The point that I am trying to make is that the 'evil' in *Romeo and Juliet* is a diffused atmospheric presence, for the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets infects kinsmen, friends, retainers, servants, all — with the Prince of Verona playing as pathetic a part as Lord Wavell did during the communal holocausts of pre-Partition India. Tens of thousands of innocent Hindus and Muslims were sacrificed at the blood-stained altar of communal frenzy during those harrowing months of 1946-7. Like a forest fire it raged, from Calcutta to Bombay, from Noakhali to Bihar, from Lahore to Amritsar. How did it all begin ? How did it end — if end it did ? How appropriate are these words to the nation-wide tragedy that was enacted in India not so long ago ? —

What, ho ! you men, you beasts,  
That quench the fire of your pernicious rage  
With purple fountains issuing from your veins !

(I. i. 81)

Capulet. Montague.

See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,  
That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love !  
And I, for winking at your discords too,  
Have lost a brace of kinsmen. All are punish'd.

(V. iii. 290)

*All are punish'd !* When whole clans like the Capulets and Montagues, whole communities like the Hindus and Muslims, or whole nations like the Germans and Russians are seized by the criminal lunacy of civil strife or the destructive frenzy of total war, *all* are somehow guilty and *all* are indiscriminately punished. 'A' is butchered in cold blood, not because he has committed a crime and deserves punishment, but because he belongs to a particular family, caste, community, or nation, or speaks a particular language, or hails from a particular region, and somebody other than 'A' coming under one of these categories is suspected to have committed a 'crime' in some remote context or other. Not only the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, but the sins (or supposed sins) of the family, caste, community, linguistic or regional group, recoil no less

upon each of its members. That is why violent disturbances and armed revolutions are a corrupting and a rotting process in the course of which the first casualties are truth, innocence, charity, beauty and love. It is fatally easy to unleash the dogs of war or release the caged beasts of preying hate. The area of conflict grows of its own accord, as it were, and every border skirmish today carries the seeds of a global nuclear holocaust. But where are the Generals — history knows only of one, Asoka Vardhana — who can bravely sound the retreat from revenge and hate? Romeo, having but lately bathed in the sunshine of amply requited love, desires to be friends with the whole world, — even (or especially) with Tybalt. When he is openly challenged by Tybalt, Romeo merely answers (III. i. 66) :

I do protest I never injur'd thee.  
But love thee better than thou canst devise  
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love ;  
And so, good Capulet — which name I tender  
As dearly as mine own — be satisfied.

"If ever a provoked man turned the other cheek Romeo did", comments Peter Alexander, and adds : "who can blame him if he has done with the fellow who strikes that too"?<sup>17</sup> It needs, however, more than one to keep the peace, for Tybalt is the typical fire-eater, Mercutio is terribly excited, and thus Romeo's way of retreat is barred and bolted. "Mercutio is mere fulminate of mercury", writes Crofts, "and it is worth noting that it is he who actually precipitates the tragedy. Tybalt has at least a grievance, or thinks he has. Mercutio has none".<sup>18</sup> Once Mercutio falls, and Tybalt falls, Romeo is a doomed man, mere "fortune's fool".

Even should we isolate the story of the lovers from the background of family feud and civic strife, the play of tragic irony is poignant in the extreme. As Bullough notes, "by the end of I. iii. both Romeo and Juliet are going to a ball, one to see the woman he thinks he loves, the other to see (with favourable eye) the man her parents want her to love".<sup>19</sup> But Rosaline and Paris are forgotten, and Romeo and Juliet are swept off their

<sup>17</sup> *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 115.

<sup>18</sup> *The Warwick Shakespeare edition*, p. 121.

<sup>19</sup> *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. I, p. 279.

feet by this avalanche-like phenomenon of love. Henceforth there is no respite, no time to pause, or think, or weigh and consider. At least Romeo, once he has left for Mantua, has a day or two of outer quiet though *within* he is seething with misery. For Juliet, however, there is no such outer quiet even. And she is not yet fourteen ! Things happen to her with lightning rapidity, surprise on surprise confounds her, and by the time she prepares herself to meet one crisis another — a graver one — overwhelms her. She is ready to take the potion on Wednesday night to avoid the proposed marriage on Thursday, but Capulet suddenly prepones the date to Wednesday, and hence she has to take the potion almost immediately. It is this too that complicates the Friar's time-table, but even so the pity — O ! the pity of it — is that the tragedy could still have been averted if the Friar had come or Juliet had awakened a few minutes earlier. The time-sense is everywhere so prepotent that we have the feeling that the lovers' heaven of happiness could be won or lost in a matter of minutes or seconds. It is, in fact, won — and lost — and won again in a storm of passion and the calm of the grave, and the amazing young lovers manage till the end to retain their radiant individuality, "not the less real because they stand for love contending with hatred, none the less human because they are not adequately motivated, all the more vivid because placed in a situation not of their own making but touched by poetic power".<sup>20</sup>

For a play that draws so heavily upon a single source — Brooke's poem — *Romeo and Juliet* is an astonishingly *original* creation, and this for two main reasons : firstly, the transfiguration achieved by the power of poetry, and, secondly, the splendour of the character-creations. Mercutio's celebrated 'Queen Mab' speech (I. iv. 53ff) is a unique flight of fancy, and by itself is enough to endear the speaker to us in spite of his faults. Romeo and Juliet, of course, are the great paradigms of romantic lovers, who are just accepted and loved as we accept the sun and the moon. Like Mercutio, the Nurse too is a superb creation ; of the earth earthy, she loves Juliet after her own fashion, and she has to be accepted just for what she is. Even Capulet and Lady Capulet — the former egotistical and tyrannical, the latter insen-

<sup>20</sup> E. E. Stoll, *Shakespeare's Young Lovers* (1937), pp. 43-4.

sitive and unimaginative — are unforgettable. Now at last Shakespeare seems to have stormed his way to the secret of romantic love, to have achieved the language that is at once beautiful and perilous hovering over the edges dividing time and eternity, and to have secured the 'Promethean heat' that can touch a few bundles of words with incandescent life. He is already on the way to *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Winter's Tale*.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE LANCASTRIAN TETRALOGY

#### I

#### THE HISTORY PLAY

A play presents a series of human actions conceived as far as possible in terms of causality. The characters presented are usually the creatures of the dramatist's imagination, or they may be drawn from legend, folk-lore, mythology, or history. Even when the dramatist borrows his main story and characters from such extraneous sources (including earlier versions in narrative or drama), it is the prerogative of his imagination to shape them anew, and sometimes to transform them altogether. The dramatist's imagination, then, is the sovereign power; and all the other so-called 'sources' necessarily fall into a subordinate position. But when the dramatist takes his theme and characters from history, his imagination has within measure to be in shackles to the broad facts of history. Even so, considerable latitude is permissible. Historical events could be adroitly telescoped, Time could be rendered in Einsteinian terms, historical and imaginary characters could be suggestively brought together, the point of view could be meaningfully shifted. When the emphasis is on the sequence of historical events alone, we call it a 'chronicle play'; but when the dramatist has an eye on the interplay of character and action — with the Bradleyan reversible reactions of character issuing in action and action issuing in character — with what Peter Ure has recently called the *continuum* of the inner and the outer man, "with actions and the motives for action; with what happens to the personality as a result of its commit-

ment to a course of action" <sup>1</sup> — then we have serious historical drama or a 'history play' like Marlowe's *Edward II* or Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Again, between a 'classical' play like the *Persians* of Aeschylus and the Shakespearian tetralogies (or even a single play like *Richard III*), there is this striking difference. "The Greek dramatist uses only one focus", says H. D. F. Kitto, "Shakespeare is continually changing his focus, to illuminate, more or less brightly, every part of his more extensive action". <sup>2</sup> It is the difference between the Greek Temple and the Gothic Cathedral once again.

The beginnings of European tragedy and comedy have both been traced back to Attic drama, to Aeschylus and Aristophanes respectively, — though even these must have been preceded by other unknown pioneers. When Aeschylus took a theme from the mythical story of Argos or of Thebes, he had to treat his characters as if they were historical persons. Every one in the audience knew the story, — that Clytemnestra slew Agamemnon on his return from Troy, that Eteocles and Polynices destroyed each other. The dramatist's freedom was limited to the poetic exploration of the situation, for the situation itself couldn't be changed except in its mere details or through the introduction of minor invented characters. The cup was as good as given, but the poet had the freedom to fill it with whatever wine, of whatever colour, he liked. In comedy, on the other hand, the dramatist enjoyed far more freedom. If mythic characters were introduced, they were but decorative or were in shackles to the dramatist's 'comic' *idea* which was the main thing. Greek tragedy was the poetic history of a people cast in a heroic mould; Greek comedy was an entertaining commentary on the changing moods and manners of the common people. And it is also possible, as F. M. Cornford has posited, that both tragedy and comedy had a common origin — the ritual offering before the shrine of a god or god-like hero:

"The old ritual drama provided Tragedy with the abstract conception or movement of its plot, or the philosophy of *Hubris*. It provided Comedy with the stock masks which could serve as a basis for its ever subtler classification of all that is ridiculous in human character". <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare and the Inward Self of the Tragic Hero* (1961).

<sup>2</sup> *Form and Meaning in Drama*, p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (1934). p. 1934.



If the history of comedy as a distinct form could be traced back at least to Aristophanes, to his first extant play the *Acharnians*; if tragedy could be traced back to Aeschylus, to his first extant play the *Suppliants*; likewise the 'history play' too could be traced back to ancient Greece, to Aeschylus' second extant play the *Persians*. Of course, Aeschylus didn't think in terms of the diverse categories of mythological plays, folk-lore plays, and historical plays: he was a tragedian, and just as in the *Suppliants* he found in the sorrowful predicament of the daughters of Danus, as they were being pursued by the fierce sons of Aegyptus, a theme for tragedy, he found also in the disaster at Salamis (a disaster, not for the Athenians, but the Persians) a theme suitable for tragedy. In the *Suppliants*, the tragedy is written from the point of view of the supplicant maidens, the daughters of Danus. But to attempt a play on the historical battle of Salamis (Aeschylus himself had fought on the Athenian side) from the Greek point of view would have made the play crudely patriotic, not movingly tragic. So Aeschylus shifted the scene of the play from Athens to far-off Susa. What is an occasion for a victory celebration in Athens would be an occasion for national mourning in the Persian capital of Susa. Thus the *Persians*, as Aeschylus created it, was no arrant jingoistic piece fabricated by a Goebbelsian official in a modern Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, but a poem and a tragedy dealing with the issues of war and defeat and humiliation in a humane and even a religious spirit. The decisive naval Battle of Salamis was fought in 480 B.C., followed by the Battle of Platea next year; more than one Athenian poet wrote a 'tragedy' on the subject and presented it as part of the celebrations in honour of the providential deliverance from the Persian peril; there had been a *Persae* by Phrynichus, and perhaps other 'Persae's too, before Aeschylus produced his in 472 B.C. There are but two characters, Atossa the Queen-Mother and Emperor Xerxes, and the latter makes his appearance only towards the end of the play. The 'Messenger', of course, has an important part, and the Ghost of Darius is invoked by Atossa and makes a key-pronouncement; and there is the Chorus of Persian Elders. As the play opens, the Elders are anxiously awaiting news from Greece where Darius is campaigning at the head of a powerful navy and army. Atossa joins the Chorus,

and there are exchanges in the form of stichomythia which contrast the ways of imperial Persia and of democratic Greece. A Messenger at last arrives distraught and gives news of the double disaster on sea and land, cataloguing the names of the Persian nobles lost at Salamis. If it is any consolation, Xerxes himself has survived the general disaster, and is on his way back. Overwhelmed by the news, Atossa invokes the spirit of Emperor Darius and apprises him of the calamity. Darius' speech leaves the audience in no doubt that it was Xerxes, driven by impetuosity and pride, that had provoked heaven to inflict this punishment on Persia :

"Mortal though he was, he thought in his folly that he would gain the mastery over all the gods, aye even over Poseidon. Must this not have been a distemper of the soul that possessed my son? ... on reaching the land of Hellas, restrained by no religious awe, they ravaged the images of the gods and gave their temples to the flames. Altars have been destroyed, statues of the gods have been overthrown from their bases in utter ruin and confusion. Wherefore having evil wrought, evil they suffer in no less measure; and other evils are still in store... For presumptuous pride, when it has burgeoned, bears as its fruit a crop of calamity, whence it reaps a plenteous harvest of tears".<sup>4</sup>

Now Xerxes himself returns, tattered and crest-fallen, with a pitiful retinue, and the tragic lament, *kommos*, follows which underlines in moving terms the meaning behind the tragic happenings. In so far as the play is written from the point of view of the defeated, and the scene itself is located in Susa with Atossa and Xerxes as the protagonists, the *Persians* is a profound tragedy, a poetic probe into the experience of the human soul in a time of great tribulation. *Hubris* has provoked *Nemesis*. On the other hand, the *Persians* was actually written during a 'celebration', and was meant to be presented at Athens. It is thus indirectly an anthem of victory — but the 'clation' is toned down till it acquires the subdued colour of a thanksgiving to the gods. The prophecy of Bucis had told the Athenians :

When they shall span the sea with ships from Cynosura  
To the holy shore of Artemis of the golden sword,  
Wild with hope at the ruin of shining Athens,  
Then shall bright Justice quench Excess, the child of Pride,

<sup>4</sup>Loeb Classical Library Translation (Aeschylus, Vol. I., pp. 179-81).

Dreadful and furious, thinking to swallow up all things.  
 Bronze shall mingle with bronze, and Ares with blood  
 Incarnadine the sea ; and all-seeing Zeus  
 And gracious Victory shall bring to Greece the day of freedom.<sup>5</sup>

Deliverance from Xerxes had come indeed to Greece, but it was the work of the gods, not of men. "The first secret of the *Persae* is", writes Gilbert Murray, "that Aeschylus preserves that emotion from beginning to end".<sup>6</sup> Although as many as 55 Persian names are mentioned in the *Persians*, on the Greek side not a single individual name finds mention. The 'victory' celebration is quite impersonal ; it is the gods, not men, who have achieved the miraculous. Aeschylus has no use for what we now call the 'personality-cult' ; and he makes his play almost a solemn thanksgiving — even a warning, in fact. For if the Persians have come to grief because of Excess and Pride, sacrilege to the gods and injustice towards men, the Greeks should ponder over this too. Heroism alone is not enough. The Persians were by no means lacking in heroism ; Aeschylus invests them with heroism by the very grandeur of their exotic names ; and Atossa has a queenly magnificence all her own. No use, therefore, merely crowing over a defeated enemy. The gods are surely *not* mocked, and therefore beware of *Moirai* and *Hubris* — the warning was pertinent to Athens, and Greece, and not alone to Xerxes and Persia.

It is a far cry from the *Persians* of Aeschylus to Bishop Bale's *Kynge Johan*, written in 1536, played before Cranmer in 1539, and surviving now in the printed version of 1561. It was basically a Morality Play, just as the *Persians* was essentially a classical tragedy, but 'history' is brought in to colour as it were the morality theme. Among the 'characters', besides King John, Cardinal Pandulphus, and the 'monk' Symon of Swinstead, are the following : the Widow England, Clergy, Sedition the Vice, Civil Order, Commonalty, Nobility, Private Wealth, Dissimulation, Usurped Power, Treason, Verity, Imperial Majesty. Abstractions often crystallise into personalities, for example Sedition = Stephen Langton ; Dissimulation = Symon ; Usurped Power = the Pope ; Private Wealth = Cardinal Pandulphus ; and, of course, Imperial Majesty = King John. Whereas the *Persians* is the

<sup>5</sup> Herodotus : *The Histories* (Penguin Classics), p. 524.

<sup>6</sup> Aeschylus : *The Creator of Tragedy* (1940), p. 125.

finished work of a supreme master of the tragic mode, *Kynge Johan* is but a crude hotch-potch of history, theology, and homily with the specific propagandist purpose of presenting John as a national hero, an English King who had gallantly stood up to the Pope :

This noble King Johan, as a faithful Moses,  
Withstood proud Pharaoh, for his Israel.  
Minding to bring it out of the land of darkness.

The Devil of the Miracle Play became the Vice of the Morality (and Vice was further to be re-clothed as the Riot of the Interlude), and in *Kynge Johan* the equation is Sedition = Vice = Langton. If the first part of the play ends with the partisan passage from which the above lines are quoted, the play itself concludes with Imperial Majesty's exhortation-cum-admonition to Clergy, Nobility and Civil Order :

The administration of a prince's governance  
Is the gift of God and His high ordinance ;  
Whom, with all your power you three ought to support  
In the laws of God, to all his people's comfort.  
First you, the Clergy, in preaching of God's word ;  
Then you, Nobility, defending with the sword ;  
You, Civil Order, in executing justice.

There is 'purpose' behind the *Persians*, but it is wholly consumed in the play ; it is not something obtrusive, and hence isolable from the nexus of the play itself. In so far as there is a 'purpose', it comes through suggestion — the undertones of *dhwani* — rather than through specific iteration. It is even, in some measure, ambivalent — for not only is the 'exultation' on account of the victory most restrained, but it is also mixed up with a sense of awe at the ways of the gods, and consequently with the need for humility. In *Kynge Johan*, on the contrary, the 'purpose' is almost everything ; it is the characters who are consumed in the 'purpose'. In Rossiter's words,

"The thesis is a religious-political moral-of-state, and, as Dryden said, 'tis the moral that directs the whole action. Bale's 'moral' is incidentally the essential iniquity of all Papists, but more pressingly that Royal Supremacy rests in the infallible rock of Holy Scripture, and that England needs The Book to tell them so".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans*, p. 121.

After *Kynge Johan*, *Gorboduc* too — based as it is on Geoffrey of Monmouth and owing a good deal to the Morality tradition — has some claims to be considered a kind of history play. The meaning behind the miscellany of horrors brought together in *Gorboduc* is the need to uphold the right of kings and frown at rebellion whatever the provocation may be, — which was indeed the constant Elizabethan bugbear. To the Elizabethans at any rate, *Gorboduc* “was as real a person as King John, and was apparently Regan’s great-great-grandson”.<sup>8</sup> Another ‘historical’ play, *Lochrine*, which has sometimes been attributed to Shakespeare, presents an earlier generation of the ‘House of Brut’, though of course these plays are no more part of the real History of Britain than the *Oedipus* plays are the real history of the city of Thebes or the *Oresteia* the real history of Argos. To Elizabeth’s subjects, however, *Gorboduc* and *Lochrine* were authentic history, and it was possible therefore for a character like Eubulus both to play a part in *Gorboduc* and to speak in the current political idiom of the Age of Shakespeare. Brut the Father of the Nation had committed the mistake of dividing Britain between his three sons, Lochrine, Camber and Albanact. That had not proved very auspicious. Now Britain was ‘whole’ again, and would it be wise, asks Eubulus, for *Gorboduc* to divide his kingdom between his two sons, Ferrex and Porrex? —

The mighty Brut, first prince of all this land,  
Possess’d the same and rul’d it well in one.  
He, thinking that the compass did suffice  
For his three sons three kingdoms eke to make,  
Cut it in three, as you would now in twain.  
But how much British blood hath since been spill  
To join again the sunder’d unity . . . .  
Ruihful remembrance is yet raw in mind.  
The gods forbid the like to chance again.

The sin of Brut, the sin of Lear, the sin of *Gorboduc* — the sin of sundering what had been joined — has pursued the British with a repetition compulsion, and was it this that lay at the root of the division of Ireland and the ‘partition’ of India? *Gorboduc* was obviously written, says M. M. Reese, “with a definite contemporary purpose, to demonstrate the dangers of a disputed or

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 132.

uncertain succession".<sup>9</sup> Once unity is destroyed and civil war is unleashed, it would not be easy to set limits to the destruction that might ensue, as the English people should have realised during the Wars of the Roses. In his last speech, Eubulus speculates in grim terms on the possible horrors of civil strife :

With fire and sword thy native folk shall perish,  
 One kinsman shall bereave another's life.  
 The father shall unwittingly slay the son,  
 The son shall slay the sire and know it not.<sup>10</sup>  
 Lo, guiltless blood shall thus each where be shed.  
 Thus shall the wasted soil yield forth no fruit,  
 But dearth and famine shall possess the land.  
 The towns shall be consum'd and burnt with fire.  
 The peopled cities shall wax desolate.  
 These be the fruits your civil wars will bring.

Sackville and Norton, the authors of *Gorboduc*, were in their own limited way dramatists doubled with political thinkers, and tried in their play to present a philosophy of history that balanced 'divine right' with the subjects' right to advise their King; but rebellion was the worst sin of all, a violation of the natural order. Thus *Gorboduc* leads, not only to *Titus Andronicus*, but also to the *Henry VI* plays, *Richard III*, *King John* and the plays in the Lancastrian tetralogy.

There is, however, the gap of about 25-30 years between *Gorboduc* (1561) and the early historical plays of Shakespeare. How are we to 'fill' this gap? *Richardus Tertius* (1579) was a Senecan exercise in Latin by Thomas Legge, and *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588) harks back to the mythical days of King Arthur. There was also the work of the 'University Wits'—Peele's *Edward I*, Greene's *James IV*, and Marlowe's *Edward II*, all of uncertain date. There are other plays too, *Jack Straw*, *King Edward III*, *Woodstock*, and *Sir Thomas More*, among them, and most attempts to date these and other plays of the period 1585-95 throw more often fresh darkness than light on the problems at issue. The following lines assigned to More in the play *Sir Thomas More* are among the 147 lines which Shakespeare contributed to the play, and it is significant that these lines also should reveal the peculiar Elizabethan preoccupa-

<sup>9</sup> *The Cease of Majesty* (1961), p. 71.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *3 Henry VI*, II. v. 55ff.

tion with 'order' and consequent dread of rebellion and civil commotion (II. iv) :

Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise  
 Hath chid down all the majesty of England ...  
 What had you got ? I'll tell you : you had taught  
 How insolence and strong hand should prevail,  
 How order should be quelled ; and by this pattern  
 Not one of you should live an aged man,  
 For other ruffians, as their fancies wrought,  
 With self-same hand, self reasons, and self right,  
 Would shark on you, and men like ravenous fishes  
 Would feed on one another ...

These or similar ideas recur in many of the history plays of the period, and this is certainly cumulative evidence of the anxiety of (what we should now call) the Elizabethan 'intelligentsia' that the fabric of civil order should not suffer erosion or damage. Shakespeare evidently shared this anxiety. But it is still difficult to affirm with conviction whether it was the work of Peele, Greene and Marlowe that led to Shakespeare experimenting with historical drama, or whether it was Shakespeare who pioneered this form of history play with a pronounced bias to political philosophy. There was no Plautus or Seneca of the history play to point the classical way in this genre. The *Persians* was apparently either not known or not regarded as a model. The local Miracle-Morality-Interlude tradition had therefore to be adapted to provide a mould for the English chronicle play and the more compact historical tragedy of the type of *Edward II* and *Richard II*. The Reformation had given the Englishman a virile sense of patriotism, a desire to look back at the past and review the vicissitudes of the national history, and even (if possible) to draw lessons for present and future guidance. The Elizabethan dramatists (and, certainly, Shakespeare) found that history could be viewed as a national pageant ; it could be viewed as a study of Nemesis in personal and national history ; it could be viewed as an arena where the forces of order and disorder come to an intestine grapple, exhausting the body politic. History could be viewed, above all, with ironic detachment, or even as a comedy ! Besides, more than one view could be directed towards any particular segment of history, and the heroic could be juxtaposed with the humdrum, the near-sublime with the utterly ridiculous.

Although the fiery purity and power of the *Persians* is nowhere found in the Elizabethan history plays—not even in Shakespeare—there are also counterbalancing advantages. What is lost in unity and concentration is gained in variety and complexity. And, anyhow, this was to be the English way,—even the unique Shakespearian way.

Of the 10 plays Shakespeare wrote covering English history,—called ‘Histories’ by Heminge and Condell in the Folio of 1623,—the first and last, *King John* and *Henry VIII* respectively, stand somewhat apart; the remaining eight, the Lancastrian tetralogy comprising *Richard II*, the 2 Parts of *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*, and the Yorkist tetralogy comprising the 3 Parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, form a more or less continuous sequence making a broad sweep of English history from 1398 to 1485, roughly some 100 years. There are vexed questions of chronology and authorship, a veritable Serbonian bog; we shouldn’t allow ourselves to be lured into it, to be lost there for ever. Of the 3 Parts of *Henry VI*, whether they were written in that order, or whether the second and third Parts weren’t written earlier than the first; whether Shakespeare was responsible for them all in their entirety, or whether there isn’t Greene’s, Nashe’s and Peele’s hand in the plays, are questions that are endlessly debated. It is likely enough that Shakespeare wrote the Yorkist tetralogy first, and the Lancastrian—which actually covers an earlier period—later;<sup>11</sup> but he must have taken or achieved a general view of the entire course of English history before he commenced work on any of the plays. The Wars of the Roses were nearer to him in point of time, and seemed immediately to offer a fruitful field for dramatic invention and portrayal. Once he had completed the Yorkist tetralogy, it was but natural that Shakespeare should wish to go back and back, and

<sup>11</sup> In his *Shakespeare’s History Plays* (p. 149), E. M. W. Tillyard thinks that Shakespeare “may well have written early versions of the plays of the second tetralogy, *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*, now lost but recast in the plays we have. Further, the *Famous Victories of Henry V* may well be an abridgement—a kind of dramatic Lamb’s Tale—of Shakespeare’s early plays on the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V”. On the other hand, in his *The Case for Shakespeare’s Authorship of ‘The Famous Victories’* (1961), Seymour M. Pitcher has ably argued that the play was really one of Shakespeare’s first efforts which elicited from Nashe the encomium “What a glorious thing it is!”



dig up and present the sources of all the trouble, the initial wrong turns that had made the rest of the national tragedy inevitable : thus *Richard II* (which starts, apparently, where the roughly contemporaneous *Woodstock* concludes) was written, and it was soon followed by *Henry IV* in two Parts and *Henry V*, and these 3 plays amply filled the gap between the dethronement and murder of Richard II and the commencement of the boy Henry VI's reign by enlarging upon the career of Hal-Harry who as Henry V proved one of the most successful of the Kings of England. To cite a recent example, we may start with World War II, and trace the origins back to World War I ; or, again, an Indian playwright might dramatise the 'Quit India' movement first, and then turn to the earlier 'Salt Satyagraha' movement or the still earlier non-cooperation movement of the nineteen twenties. Eugene O'Neill planned a cycle of 9 or more plays to cover the vicissitudes of an immigrant Irish family from 1775 to 1925, though only one of the plays, *A Touch of the Poet*, which was to have been the third play in the cycle, was actually completed. Neither is it necessary to discuss here whether Shakespeare planned these 2 sequences as tetralogies, or whether each play—or each Part of a play—was conceived as an independent dramatic unit. Tetralogies—or even single plays for that matter—do not erupt all of a sudden, as Pallas Athene erupted from Olympian Zeus ; just as buildings rise brick by brick, so too plays are written line by line. But this does not mean that the architect or dramatist has no sustaining vision of the whole all the time the work is in progress. Each tetralogy has a unity of design, and each play or Part of a play (like *Henry IV* or *Henry VI*) has also its individual unity ; and the 2 tetralogies, taken together, have a massive completeness indeed, rather akin to an impressive edifice with a spacious ground floor and a no less spacious first storey. Continuing our simile, *King John* is the gate-way leading to the edifice, and *Henry VIII* is a flight of stairs to the terrace, opening to the skies of the future. In the Bastard, Philip Faulconbridge, English patriotism first finds robust expression, as later, in John of Gaunt, 'England' finds her true laureate. The stirring lines—so well-known that they needn't be repeated here—with which the Bastard concludes *King John* naturally link up with John of Gaunt's no less famous speech in *Richard II* (II. i. 40) —

This royal throne of kings, this scept'ed isle,  
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
 This other Eden, demi-paradise ...  
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England ---

again so celebrated, an Englishman's *Bande mutaram* almost, that it needn't be extracted here in full; and the 2 passages, one a blunt soldier's affirmation and the other a dying elder statesman's utterance, may be read in significant relation with Cranmer's 'prophetic' speech towards the close of *Henry VIII* (V. v. 17) :

This royal infant — heaven still move about her! —  
 Though in her cradle, yet now promises  
 Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings,  
 Which time shall bring to ripeness.

Elizabeth is Cranmer's immediate inspiration, and Shakespeare no doubt wishes to say flattering things about James I's reign; but it is no less true that England is the real theme of this rhapsody, as England — her past, present and future — is the theme of Shakespeare's ten historical plays.

## II

### KING JOHN

*The Troublesome Raigne of King John* was published in 2 Parts in 1591, and Shakespeare's *King John* in the Folio of 1623; what is the relation between these two plays? *The Troublesome Raigne* is longer by 300 lines than *King John*, and it has almost twice as many speaking parts as Shakespeare's play. The plotting is substantially the same in both, for *King John* follows *The Troublesome Raigne* almost scene by scene. If *The Troublesome Raigne* was the sole source of *King John*, how was it that Shakespeare's revision was, except with regard to the language, such a pedestrian affair? Why couldn't he put his heart into it? On the other hand, if *King John* preceded *The Troublesome Raigne* — the latter being merely the Bad Quarto of the former — how was it that the pirated play reproduced so little of the language of the original, and was besides a longer play in 2 Parts, and not (what one would expect) a mere garbled

summary? Could both *The Troublesome Raigne* and *King John* have been independently based on Holinshed's *Chronicles*, a second edition of which came out in 1587? — not likely, for the similarities between the two plays are far too many. Was there an intermediary between *The Troublesome Raigne* and *King John* — the 'missing link' that could iron out our perplexities? These conundrums arise because scholars are apt to take it for granted that Shakespeare had a propensity for refurbishing other people's plays, and that he was rather a late starter as a dramatist. He imitated Lyly, Peele and Greene in comedy; Kyd and Marlowe in tragedy; and in the history play? — surely, his propensity being what it was, he must have imitated again! Just as it is no more the orthodoxy to assume that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was based on an earlier *Hamlet*, presumably by Kyd, for now it is suggested that Shakespeare himself might have written the earlier *Hamlet* as well; just as Thorndike's view that in *Cymbeline* Shakespeare was imitating Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* is no more seriously canvassed, since the latter might conceivably have been an imitation of Shakespeare's play; so also it is not now fantastic to urge that, not Peele nor Greene, but Shakespeare himself started the fashion of the history play, capitalising the surge of national sentiment during the late fifteen eighties, while the other dramatists — Peele, Greene, Marlowe, and the rest — only followed his example. Why not? In his Clark Lectures at Cambridge, F. P. Wilson asked:

"When we look for these early chronicle plays written before the Armada, where are they?... there is no certain evidence that any popular dramatists before Shakespeare wrote a play based on English history... My conclusion is, though I am frightened at my own temerity in saying so, that for all we know there were no popular plays on English history before the Armada and that Shakespeare may have been the first to write one".<sup>12</sup>

Even as regards *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, which probably preceded the Armada year, there may be something in Tillyard's view that it was but an abridgement — "a dramatic Lamb's Tale" — of Shakespeare's first (and now lost) versions of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*. While Dover Wilson in the *New Shakespeare* edition (1936) discounts the possibility of *King John*

<sup>12</sup> *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare* (1953), pp. 105ff.

preceding *The Troublesome Raigne*, in the more recent *New Arden* edition of the play (1953), E. A. J. Honigmann, after an exhaustive re-examination of the whole problem, holds that *The Troublesome Raigne* was but the Bad Quarto of *King John*. This leads to the further conclusion that Shakespeare's main source was, not *The Troublesome Raigne*, but Holinshed, though he might also have used other sources like Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* and Matthew Paris's *Historia Major*. Philip the Bastard is mentioned in Holinshed as Richard I's son, who "killed the Viscount Limoges, in revenge of his father's death". Honigmann's thesis is that Shakespeare invented the Faulconbridge story and merged it with the Philip of Holinshed's Chronicles.<sup>13</sup>

*King John* is not among the popular plays of Shakespeare. John lacks Richard II's capacity for poetry and Richard III's diabolical stature. One's first impression is that the Bastard is allowed by the dramatist to steal many a scene in the play (if not the play itself). It has been argued by A. Bonjour that the play projects

"a deliberately contrasted evolution. John's career represents a falling curve, the Bastard's career a rising curve ... The structure of the play is thus remarkably balanced ... in very simple terms: decline of a hero -- rise of a hero".<sup>14</sup>

But this view is not sustainable, for when the play ends the new 'star' that rises is Henry III, not Philip. The Bastard may be the spokesman of blunt, resolute, humorous England, but it would be wrong to look upon his role as something analogous to that of a Bismarck in nineteenth-century Germany. The difficulty with the play is that it tries to comprehend the events of some years — disputed succession, protracted negotiations, battles in France and England, dynastic marriage, attempted murder, deflection of the nobles and their contrite return, family proliferation — and one seeks in vain for either a tight plot or a dominant personality (like Hamlet) that holds together the many strands of the story. Shiftiness is John's chief 'mark', even as downrightness is the Bastard's; neither, not even the two together, can impose on the play a sense of unity. A third interest that competes with John is Prince Arthur. Act I begins

<sup>13</sup> The *New Arden* edition, p. xxiv.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in the *New Arden* edition. p. lxxi.

with Chatillon asking the "borrowed majesty" of England to hand it over to Prince Arthur, the rightful heir, and on receiving a curt refusal, hurls the French King's defiance at John. In Act II, when the armies of Austria, France and England meet in front of Angiers, a sudden peace is patched up between France and England through the marriage of Lewis the Dauphin and John's niece, Blanch of Spain. Arthur's fortunes that seemed likely to prosper in Act I thus suffer sudden decline in Act II, but in Act III the wind once more blows in his favour for a while — but his hopes are blasted when, as a result of the resort to arms, he is taken prisoner (III. iv) and sent to England. Cardinal Pandolph now coldly speculates on future possibility (III. iv. 131) :

John hath seiz'd Arthur ; and it cannot be  
That, whiles warm life plays in that infant's veins,  
The misplac'd John should entertain an hour,  
One minute, nay, one quiet breath of rest.  
A sceptre snatch'd with an unruly hand  
Must be as boisterously maintain'd as gain'd ...

Since Arthur's liquidation is taken for granted, the Dauphin decides to cash in by invading England and claiming the throne as Blanch's husband. John of course has already decreed Arthur's death at the hands of Hubert (III. iii. 59):

*K. John.* Good Hubert, Hubert, Hubert, throw thine eye  
On yon young boy ...  
He is a very serpent in my way ...  
Thou art his keeper.  
*Hubert.* And I'll keep him so  
That he shall not offend your Majesty.  
*K. John.* Death.  
*Hubert.* My lord ?  
*K. John.* A grave.  
*Hubert.* He shall not live.  
*K. John.* Enough !  
I could be merry now. *Hubert.* I love thee.

In all Shakespeare, there is probably no bit of dialogue more cynically callous than this. Act IV is crucial to the play. In IV. i, Arthur talks Hubert out of the execution of the murderous plan (it is now, not the killing of Arthur, but the mere blinding of

him). This is one of the most affecting scenes in the play, an anthology piece like the Trial Scene in *The Merchant of Venice*. In IV. ii, after a good deal of rhetorical skirmishing with the King in which Pembroke and Salisbury play a duet in hyperbole —

to be possess'd with double pomp,  
To guard a title that was rich before,  
To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,  
To throw a perfume on the violet,  
To smooth the ice, or add another hue  
Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light  
To seek the beaucous eyc of heaven to garnish,  
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess ...  
  
When workinen strive to do better than well,  
They do confound their skill in covetousness;  
And oftentimes excusing of a fault  
Doth make the fault the worse by th' excuse . . . --

John realises at last the consequences of his crime :

There is no sure foundation set on blood,  
No certain life achiev'd by others' death.<sup>15</sup>

He even goes to the extent of blaming Hubert for the crime (IV. ii. 208):

It is the curse of kings to be attended  
By slaves that take their humours for a warrant  
To break within the bloody house of life ...  
How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds  
Make deeds ill done! ...

On this scene, Reese makes the shrewd comment: "it decides John's stature. He lacks the insight of Macbeth, who cursed the juggling fiends but always knew in his heart that they did but direct him the way he was going. Macbeth accepted moral responsibility, and John does not".<sup>16</sup> When presently Hubert tells him that Prince Arthur is alive, John is overjoyed, for he sees in this the solvent of his immediate political difficulties. In III. iv, Arthur leaps from the castle and dies, and this but inflames

<sup>15</sup> IV. ii. 104-5. In *The Troublesome Raigne* (Part I. Sc. xiii. 236-7), John is more explicit:

His death has freed me from a thousand fears,  
But it has purchast me ten times ten thousand foes.

<sup>16</sup> *The Cease of Majesty*, p. 274.

the Lords — Pembroke, Salisbury and Bigot — who cannot help believing that Hubert is the guilty man. The Bastard has his suspicions too, but he is more worried by the general political and military situation. Even his vaulting self-assurance fails him for the moment (IV. iii. 140):

I am amaz'd, methinks, and lose my way  
Among the thorns and dangers of this world.

Till the end of Act IV, then, the Arthur-theme has gripped our hearts. Now Arthur, although not actually murdered, has been driven to his death; his mother, Constance, and John's mother, Elinor, — the two determined women who had tugged at the hapless boy from two opposite directions, — are both dead. The Dauphin is fighting for high stakes, to secure England for himself, not to avenge the wrong done to Arthur; and another of Arthur's supporters of Act II, Limoges, had lost his life at the Bastard's hands during the engagement near Angiers. Meantime, with his habitual shiftiness, John makes his peace with Rome, and is received into favour by Pandolph, though this doesn't purchase peace with France. What price, then, the death of Arthur? Not quite knowing whom the cap would fit, the Bastard has already pronounced sentence on Arthur's murderer (taking him to be Hubert):

Thou'rt damn'd as black—nay, nothing is so black—  
Thou art more deep damn'd than Prince Lucifer;  
There is not yet so ugly a fiend of hell  
As thou shalt be, if thou didst kill this child.

(IV. iii. 121)

And death comes to John, not as it comes to Richard III or Macbeth with a bang, but with a mere whimper — through poisoning by a monk of Swinstead Abbey. John's dying words reveal in some measure the consciousness of his guilt (V. vii. 46):

Within me is a hell; and there the poison  
Is as a fiend confin'd to tyrannise  
On unreprieveable condemned blood.

When John dies, Salisbury makes the simple comment: "But now a king — now thus". Proposals for peace with honour follow, and the Bastard's eloquent peroration concludes the play.

From the above analysis, it would be clear that the Arthur-John conflict is the heart of the play's intention. It is a dramatic struggle between two opposites, not two 'mighty opposites' (nephew and uncle) as in *Hamlet*, but between a 'noble boy' — who tells his mother (II. i. 165) "I am not worth this coil that's made for me" and who wishes (IV. i. 17) that he "kept sheep" and could be merry, or even that he were only Hubert's son — and his uncle, the shifty ignoble King. It is 'legitimacy' in the person of Arthur that drives John from folly to folly, crime to crime. Just as in *Julius Caesar*, though Caesar is dead in III. i, the spirit of Caesar is abroad at the field of Philippi, so too Arthur is in a manner of speaking a continuing influence till the end of the play. Even so, Arthur no more than John or the Bastard is the 'hero' of the play. Of John, Honigsmann writes: "if he is not the hero, he is certainly the villain".<sup>17</sup> We might likewise add: if Arthur is not the hero, he is certainly the victim; and if the Bastard is not the hero, he is certainly the chorus. Just as *King John* develops the theme of disputed succession, with three claimants — John, Arthur, Lewis — to the throne of England, the play also dangles before the reader three claimants to the status of 'hero'. John is in possession of the throne, and he gives the name to the play; our heart goes out in sympathy to Arthur; and we love to recall the Bastard's speeches — notably the 'Commodity' soliloquy (II. i. 573), the 'Be great in act' exhortation (V. i. 44), and his concluding affirmation as a patriot. And deliberate distribution of emphasis was, perhaps, the real key to Shakespeare's plotting and characterisation.

Of the other characters, Constance has been much admired. She is no doubt often too unrestrained, but she is a widow and a mother, and much may be forgiven her. The repeated references to 'blood', 'bleed', 'bloody' (there are nearly 70 such references) have been noted by scholars, and sometimes the imagery comes thick with a suffocating effect on the reader. For example, when King John says (III. i. 340):

France, I am burn'd up with inflaming wrath,  
A rage whose heat hath this condition  
That nothing can allay, nothing but *blood*,  
The *blood*, and dearest-valu'd *blood*, of France;

<sup>17</sup> *The New Arden* edition, p. lxx.



King Philip promptly answers :

Thy rage shall burn thee up, and thou shalt turn  
To ashes, ere our *blood* shall quench that fire.

There is something terribly primitive in this iteration of the 'blood' imagery, and this should not only affiliate *King John* to the Elizabethan tragedies of blood and revenge but also 'date' the play accordingly — much nearer 1590 than 1595.

111

*RICHARD II*

Between King John and Richard II there were four Kings of England — Henry III, Edward I, Edward II and Edward III. Prince Henry becomes Henry III at the end of *King John*. There were plays on Edward I and Edward II by Peele and Marlowe respectively, and a play entitled *The Raigne of King Edward the Third*, first printed in 1596, has been attributed to Shakespeare himself, and Tillyard calls it "the most steadily thoughtful of all the Chronicle Plays outside Shakespeare".<sup>18</sup> Edward III is also repeatedly referred to in Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the other plays in the two tetralogies. Of the reign of Richard II himself, more than one play was known to Shakespeare's contemporaries. There was, for instance, *The Life and Death of Jack Straw*, written more or less in the Morality tradition, which tried to dramatise the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, which as a boy of fifteen Richard had handled with splendid assurance. The play made it clear that the rebels, being tempted by Demagogue and Vice, ignored the counsel of Church and State, and so came to grief. A far more important play dealing with Richard II's reign was *Woodstock*, which has recently come out in a new edition (1946) by A. P. Rossiter. Difficult to date like most of the plays of the period, *Woodstock* probably belongs to 1592, and hence preceded *Richard II*. Shakespeare almost certainly took for granted that his audience was acquainted with *Woodstock*, or at least with the chain of events in that 'Moral History'.

<sup>18</sup> *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 114.

Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, was Richard II's uncle and was leader of the baronial faction opposed to the King during the latter part of his reign. John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, after some years of stewardship of Young Richard's reign, went away to Spain to stake out a claim to the throne of Castile, and the struggle in England came to be sharply polarised between Woodstock and the King's principal adviser, de la Pole. With the help (among others) of Bolingbroke, Gaunt's son, Woodstock dominated the 'Merciless Parliament' of 1388; but the very next year, Richard, then 23, declared himself of age and henceforth was his own master. Some of the 'Lords Appellant' joined Richard, while Woodstock was spirited away to Calais and there done to death. Bolingbroke became Duke of Hereford, and the Duke of York's son, Rutland, became Duke of Aumerle. It was when, in January 1398, Richard and his chief supporters — Sir John Bushy, Sir Henry Green and Sir William Bagot — relegated all power to a hand-picked committee of eighteen lords (the Parliament obligingly consenting to its own deccase) that discontent against the King and his favourites vigorously raised its head again. It is with this background that complaints and accusations like the following have to be read. Thus John of Gaunt (II. i. 57):

This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land ...  
Is now leas'd out — I die pronouncing it —  
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.  
England ... is now bound in with shame,  
With inky blois and rotten parchment bonds.

Again, the Lords Ross and Willoughby speak out, one after another (II. i. 246):

The commons hath he pill'd with grievous taxes;  
And quite lost their hearts; the nobles hath he fin'd  
For ancient quarrels and quite lost their hearts ...  
And daily new exactions are devis'd.  
As blanks, benevolences, and I wot not what.

This was evidently a fourteenth-century equivalent to the system of permits, licences and quotas that play so large a part in circumscribing freedom and creating scarcity in our own times. In return for a monthly stipend of £7000, Richard gave his

favourites the necessary bonds and benevolences (what we should call permits and licences) to exploit the people to the full. What is merely suggested in *Richard II* is explicitly presented in *Woodstock*.<sup>19</sup>

Shakespeare's play covers the last 18 months of Richard's life, in other words from September 1398 to February 1400. Except for minor details and transpositions, Shakespeare faithfully follows his sources — mainly, Holinshed's *Chronicles*. But for this and the other History Plays, Shakespeare was probably indebted in greater or lesser measure to various other sources as well — the *Book of Homilies* (1547-74), Froissart's *Chronicles* (in Lord Berners' translation), Polydore Vergil's *History of England* in Latin, Sir Thomas More's unfinished *History of Richard III*, Edward Hall's voluminous *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548), the composite work in verse *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559-87), and Daniel's verse *History of the Civil Wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster* (1595).<sup>20</sup> Both Hall and *A Mirror* covered roughly the same period of English history, Richard II to Henry VII, while Daniel's *History*, although it too begins with Richard II, takes the story only upto the reign of Edward IV. Shakespeare was both an inveterate and an intelligent borrower; while he was not squeamish about using even the very language of his sources, neither did he feel bound to follow his sources in every particular. He was not only writing dramas of convenient length for production on the stage — not only dramatising a considerable stretch of English history — but he was also (subject to these two limitations) trying to project his own vision of English history, of all human history in fact. Individual men and women are driven by passions, preferences and curious propensities. Upto a point they seem to be masters of their fate and captains

<sup>19</sup> A. P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns* (1961), pp. 30-2.

<sup>20</sup> See Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, pp. 25ff, 238ff. Bullough, in his *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (Vol. III, 1960, and Vol. IV, 1962), has brought together the possible sources and analogues for the History Plays and his broad conclusion is that Shakespeare generally followed Hall and Holinshed: "he took over not only the attitude but the pattern of Hall's history, and when he fitted in the earlier reigns in his second tetralogy, drawing more perhaps now on Holinshed than before, he had no difficulty in preserving enough of the didactic design to keep (despite some changes in his conception of the History play) a remarkable consistency throughout" (Vol. III, p. 15).

of their souls. But, suddenly, these very people find themselves no more than helpless thistledowns of Fortune (or Fate). Their success is also their failure, and their failure may carry unperceived the germs of future success. The short view blurs the vision, and often leads to wrong conclusions and wrong-headed actions. Take a somewhat longer view, and death is seen to be the monotonous end of criminal and victim alike. Take a still longer view, and a pattern of moral causation *seems* to emerge. But how long should this long view be? How far into the night of history can we profitably look back? Is it certain that what we think we see is all that there is to see? Taking his cue from Hall and *A Mirror for Magistrates*, Shakespeare made *Richard II* the starting point of his sustained exercise in historical re-creation, and when he had done with the two tetralogies, he had traversed almost a century (1398-1485). There are 8 Kings: Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI, Edward IV, Edward V, Richard III, and Henry VII — whether they reigned long or only for short terms, whether their reign was nominal or real. And each of the eight five-act plays has its own distinctive individuality and even unity, though each certainly gains in meaning if read along with the others. *Macbeth* too is 'history' even as the *Iliad* or the *Persians* is 'history'. But if, like Alexander and Wade-Gery, we accept Tolstoy's distinction between historian and artist ('the historian has to deal with the results of an event, the artist with the fact of the event'), the poet of *Macbeth* was an artist presenting tragic experience in its universality, while the creator of the tetralogies was more of a historian; and so Alexander rightly affirms that "there is a national bias in the Histories that those who would handle them critically must allow for". To call the 8 plays a 'national epic' in the sense the *Aeneid* is the epic of Rome or *Pan Tadeusz* is the epic of Poland would perhaps be wrong. Yet, after all, in these plays considered as a whole the theme is more than this or that King, more than the rise and fall of the Red or the White Rose; another theme seems to emerge, obscurely, irresistibly, overwhelmingly—England, the land, its rulers, its people, its past, present and future. In this sense it must be conceded that the 8 plays taken together form a kind of dramatised national epic of England. Shakespeare, of course, didn't make such a claim for his history plays. But if the cumulative impact of the two tetralogies on us is what

we ordinarily experience when we read an epic, the name needn't be denied to them. There are epic dramas like *The Dynasts* and epic novels like *War and Peace* (and even *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*); and Shakespeare's history plays too may be viewed as a 'national epic'.

Although there is a gap of 185 years between *King John* and *Richard II*, the pattern of ambition-folly-crime-punishment seems to vary but little. In *King John*, the King orders the killing (or blinding) of Arthur, his nephew; in *Richard II*, what at the outset seems to have given a push to the action is the killing of an uncle (Woodstock) at the orders of his nephew, the King. Of the intervening Kings, it was Edward II's role to rehearse the part that was later to be played by his great-grandson, Richard II. As for Edward III, historians like Sir John Hayward (in his *History of Henry IV*) and Davies of Hereford (in his *Microcosmos*) have as good as accused him of playing into the hands of the people who deposed Edward II and conniving at the murder of his uncle, the Duke of Kent. Sir Walter Raleigh also, writing in the opening years of the new century, played at enunciating the laws of moral causation as a mirror for magistrates — for example, that the sins of the grandfathers are usually visited on their grandchildren! And so from reign to reign, from generation to generation, the linked sequences go on, the moral patterns repeat, and "proud man, dress'd in a little brief authority" foregoes nothing, forgets nothing, — and apparently learns nothing.

*Richard II* opens with one of the memorable lines in Shakespeare: "Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster" — a perfect iambic line, as dignified as it is adequate. Presently the foreground is occupied by the two impetuous men, Mowbray and Bolingbroke. As they hurl defiance at each other, it is like the rumble of distant thunder intimating an impending storm. After other accusations against Mowbray, Bolingbroke works up to this climax (I. i. 98):

Further I say . . .

That he did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death.

Suggest his soon-believing adversaries,

And consequently, like a traitor coward,

Stuic'd out his innocent soul through streams of blood;

Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries,

Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth,  
To me for justice and rough chastisement.

Mowbray answers the charges in the same order, and coming to the charge of murder last declares :

I slew him not, but to my own disgrace  
Neglected my sworn duty in that case.

Mowbray and Bolingbroke had themselves been among the Lords Appellant ranged against the King, but, having now fallen out, they precipitate the crisis. It is difficult to answer the question as to who exactly killed Woodstock. Bolingbroke charges Mowbray, and Mowbray pleads only a certain negligence on his part. Both Bolingbroke and Mowbray insinuatingly implicate the King, which is the cause of his fidgeting. Later, when Bolingbroke reopens the question of Woodstock's murder, Bagot accuses Aumerle (York's son), and Fitzwater corroborates as follows (IV. i. 80):

I heard the banish'd Norfolk say  
That thou, Aumerle, didst send two of thy men  
To execute the noble Duke at Calais.

Even masterful Bolingbroke fidgets, and diplomatically adjourns the trial to a future occasion. One reason is the arrival of York with the King's message of abdication. But is there another reason as well? Like Richard, is Bolingbroke too guilty — though at some remove — of Woodstock's murder? Sifting the evidence carefully after cross-references to *Woodstock*, Rossiter explains that the Duke of Gloucester was kidnapped in a masque when Richard and his favourites were present, conveyed to Calais, and killed by 2 men (sent from England presumably by Aumerle) with the knowledge of the Governor Lapoole (or Mowbray).<sup>21</sup> One way or another, all three nephews — Richard, Bolingbroke, Aumerle — are guilty of Woodstock's murder. In I. i, we have the feeling that a sordid crime has been committed, and Boling-

<sup>21</sup> *Angel with Horns*, p. 34. Towards the end of *Woodstock* (V. iv) Richard breaks down and says:

the fearfull wrath of heaven  
Sitts heavy on our heads for Woodstock's death.  
Blood cries for blood, and that almightie hand  
Permitts not murder unrevenged to stand ...

broke is the would-be avenger. But as we read further and further, the confusion only thickens. In I. ii, when the Duchess of Gloucester asks John of Gaunt to avenge his brother's death, he merely says :

God's is the quarrel ; for God's substitute,  
His deputy anointed in His sight,  
Hath caus'd his death ; the which if wrongfully,  
Let heaven revenge ; for I may never lift  
An ungrateful arm against His minister.

The qualification "if wrongfully" is masterly : Gaunt knows that Woodstock has been murdered with the knowledge (and at the express wishes) of the King. If Woodstock had deserved to die, only justice had been done to him ; but "if wrongfully" he had fallen, it was for God alone to punish the God's anointed. Doesn't Gaunt know more than he is giving out ? Doesn't York know about his own son's complicity in the affair ? Like a hazy fog Woodstock's murder fills the atmosphere of *Richard II*, and it is a very fitting background for the action of the play.

In I. iii, the 'action' takes a leap forward. There is all the sound and fury of the impending clash of arms between Mowbray and Bolingbroke, but suddenly all is arrested. Richard exiles his impetuous cousin for a period of 6 years, and Mowbray for life. More follows in II. i, for when John of Gaunt breathes his last after giving a bit of his mind to Richard, the latter seizes his uncle's "plate, coin, revenues, and moveables", thus depriving the rightful heir of his ducal heritage. This foolish, spiteful and vindictive action provokes even the weak Duke of York to a spirited protest culminating in the warning (II. i. 195) :

Take Hereford's rights away, and take from Time  
His charters and his customary rights ;  
Let not tomorrow then ensue today ;  
Be not thyself — for how art thou a king  
But by fair sequence and succession ?  
Now, afore God — God forbid I say true ! —  
If you do wrongfully seize Hereford's rights ...  
You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,  
You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts,  
And prick my tender patience to those thoughts  
Which honour and allegiance cannot think.

But Richard goes his own way to meet his doom, and York submits, though not without an oppressive premonition of the gathering storm. As Richard starts for Ireland leaving York behind him as Lord Governor of England, even then Bolingbroke makes vast preparation — "eight tall ships, three thousand men of war" — to sail towards Ravenspurgh. Giving this news to fellow dissidents like Ross and Willoughby, the Earl of Northumberland suggests that they should all proceed to receive Bolingbroke. The exiled Bolingbroke is returning to become King; the King is exiling himself, and when he returns he will be deposed, jailed, and put to death. The 'well' image (IV. i. 184) in the deposition scene with one bucket going up and another coming down brings out even more vividly this irony at the heart of the play.

In II. ii, the Queen learns that Bolingbroke has already arrived "with uplifted arms" at Ravenspurgh, that Northumberland, his son Percy (Hotspur), and other Lords have joined him, and that the Earl Worcester has "broken his staff, resign'd his stewardship" and fled to the rebel. York can give but cold comfort :

The nobles they are fled, the commons they are cold  
And will, I fear, revolt on Hereford's side ...  
Well, somewhat we must do ... All is uneven,  
And everything is left at six and seven.

When in II. iii York charges Bolingbroke with treason, the latter artfully quibbles and appeals to the father-image in his uncle :

As I was banish'd, I was banish'd Hereford;  
But as I come, I come for Lancaster ...  
You are my father, for methinks in you  
I see old Gaunt alive ...

Ineffective as ever, York speaks the right words to the rebels but feels too paralysed to act (II. iii. 140):

But in this kind to come, in braving arms,  
Be his own carver and cut out his way,  
To find out right with wrong — it may not be;  
And you that do abet him in this kind  
Cherish rebellion.

York would be neutral, he says, and adds almost immediately :  
"It may be I will go with you". Bolingbroke has thus scored,



quick victories, and from claiming his Lancastrian inheritance he advances to the next aim of weeding and plucking away "the caterpillars of the commonwealth" (II. iii. 166). No wonder, in II. iv, the faithful Salisbury apostrophises the still absent Richard :

I see thy glory like a shooting star  
Fall to the base earth from the firmament.

A bucket goes down, a bucket comes up; a star sets, a star rises; action and reaction are (in Newton's words) "equal and opposite".

Bolingbroke is as good as his word. In III. i, he liquidates Bushy and Green, two of the 'caterpillars'. While his progress is triumphantly under way, Richard lands in Wales, finds his army dispersed already, and loses himself in a whirl of words. Like the Bastard who tries to buoy John up with hope and courage, Aumerle tries a similar role ("Comfort, my liege; remember who you are") but to no purpose. The more misfortunes pursue him, the more Richard attitudinises and platitudinises in poetical terms, talks fatalistically of "graves, of worms, and epitaphs", philosophises on man's naked condition when he is without "respect, tradition, form, and ceremonious duty", and decides to discharge the power he has and withdraw to Flint Castle. Richard is here revealed as his own enemy; his greatest traitor—and Bolingbroke's fifth column—is the one that is lodged *within*. After the parley before the Castle, Richard appears on its walls, and this evokes from York the words (III. iii. 68):

Yet looks he like a king. Behold, his eye,  
As bright as is the eagle's, lightens forth  
Controlling majesty.

One part of the truth about Kings like Richard (and Lear) is that, without the appurtenances of power, a King is but a mere-forked animal; another part of the truth is that even in decline a King is still a King—ay, every inch a King. Once again, Richard talks too much, while Bolingbroke leaves much of the talking to Northumberland. Richard is verily like a "frantic man", and when he tells Bolingbroke (III. iii. 197) "Your own is yours, and I am yours, and all", Richard has (like the proverbial fifth columnist) formally handed over the keys of the city to the invader. Well might he say later (IV. i. 247):

Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,  
I find myself a traitor with the rest.

Between III. iii (the scene of submission) and IV. i (the scene of deposition), Shakespeare interposes the symbolistic scene in the Duke of York's Garden. The gardener talks the quintessential wisdom of politics while apparently engaged in giving instructions on gardening to his two servants (III. iv. 33) :

Go thou, and like an executioner  
Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays  
That look too lofty in our commonwealth :  
All must be even in our government.  
You thus employ'd, I will go root away  
The noisome weeds which without profit suck  
The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers.

The rule of safety is that straggling branches should be cut, weeds cast out, and the soil's fertility renewed. The servant is as apt as the master and further elaborates the filiations between the small garden and the commonwealth itself as a garden (III. iv. 40) :

Why should we, in the compass of a pale,  
Keep law and form and due proportion,  
Showing, as in a model, our firm estate,  
When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,  
Is full of weeds ; her fairest flowers chok'd up,  
Her fruit trees all unprun'd, her hedges ruin'd,  
Her knots disordered, and her wholesome herbs  
Swarming with caterpillars ?

A strange community where Bolingbroke and the gardeners talk the *same* language. "Caterpillars of the commonwealth", he said ; and both the words 'commonwealth' and 'caterpillars' recur in the gardeners' conversation. Even so, this is but splendid verbal embroidery, for when a Hamlet wishes to say the same thing, his words are (I. ii. 135) :

Fie on't ! Ah, fie ! 'tis an unweeded garden,  
That grows to seed ; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely.

And so we hark back and forth, from Richard to Lear, from the gardeners to Hamlet ; and the Duke of York's Garden overflows

into England, and England — this Eden, this demi-paradise — now declined to an "unweeded garden" overflows beyond its confines and comprises the whole world.

The deposition scene is a very painful affair. Just as the opening scene in James Joyce's *Ulysses* describes a Black Mass, IV. i enacts the Hell of a Black Coronation — a coronation in *reverse*. Its ritual character has been commented on by critics like Pater, Dover Wilson and G. I. Duthie. There is something monstrously repulsive in the elaboration of the formalities leading to the double event of Richard's deposition and Henry Bolingbroke's accession. On 29 September 1399, Richard executed a deed of resignation, acknowledging his unfitness to reign; the next day, Parliament accepted his resignation, and pronounced sentence of deposition. Bolingbroke thereupon claimed the crown by "right line of blood" as heir to Edward III, and Parliament 'accepted' him, and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York led him to the throne. These events took place 565 years ago, but similar events are happening all the time. For example, in February 1955, the Russian Premier, Malenkov, asked to be relieved of his duties as Chairman of the Council of Ministers confessing his "lack of experience in local work" and want of experience of "directly administering a given branch of national economy at the level of a Ministry or Directorate". Within 3 hours after the acceptance of the resignation, the Supreme Soviet appointed Marshal Bulganin as the new Chairman of the Council of Ministers. The power behind both the moves was Nikita Khrushchov, First Secretary of the Communist Party, even as the power behind Bolingbroke in 1399-1400 was the Earl of Northumberland.<sup>22</sup> Doesn't history repeat itself with a tiresome monotony? Isn't a scene like IV. i in *Richard II* dyed with the hues of universality?

As York had warned Richard earlier (II. i) though in vain, now the Bishop of Carlisle warns the rebels and the usurper, but in even more uncompromising terms (IV. i. 134) :

My Lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,  
Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king;  
And if you crown him, let me prophesy —  
The blood of English shall manure the ground,

<sup>22</sup> This illustration came handy when I lectured at the Annamalai University on 9 March 1955 on the subject of Crime and Punishment in Shakespeare, with reference to the History Plays.

And future ages groan for this foul act ;  
 Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,  
 And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars  
 Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound ;  
 Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny,  
 Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd  
 The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.

Not satisfied with the abdication of Richard and his imprisonment at Pomfret Castle, Bolingbroke (now Henry IV) manoeuvres to bring about Richard's murder so that he may well be rid of "this living fear" (V. iv. 2). Rebellion and usurpation capped by regicide : such is the cumulative figure of Henry's quick career in 'crime'. The plot to kill the new King at Oxford is discovered by York, and although one of the plotters, Aumerle, receives pardon, the Abbot of Westminster and "all the rest of that consorted crew" are to be given short shrift. When news is brought to him along with the coffin that his 'living fear' is dead indeed, Henry IV quibbles again, and makes a show of contrition (V. vi. 40) :

Though I did wish him dead,  
 I hate the murderer, love him murdered ...  
 Lords, I protest my soul is full of woe  
 That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow ...  
 I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,  
 To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.

Just as Richard as a character puzzles us even as he puzzled his contemporaries, his speech too both dazzles and puzzles us, and even the language of the play raises its own problems. For a play written round about 1595, the number of rhymed lines (540 out of a total of 2755 ; and no prose at all) is disproportionately large. Mannered repetition and punning ornamentation are almost promiscuous. On his death-bed, Gaunt puns on his own name ; Richard puns and embroiders all the time. One could differentiate between the verse of *Richard II* and the mature verse of, say, *Macbeth* (or even of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*) ; and also between the consciously stylised speech of Richard and Gaunt on the one hand and of Bolingbroke and Northumberland on the other. Partly the difference is due to Shakespeare's own attitude to language. In the later plays language is more than the dress of thought ; it is instantaneous communication of

feeling, mood, thought, character and action, enforcing the reader's own participation in the unfolding drama. In *Richard II*, the language hasn't yet shed its vanities of colour, sound, similitude and balance. The word is a pose, or a tool, or a screen to hide behind, — even a game, almost an end in itself. Most of the characters talk more than there is need, but there are modulations that mark the speakers from one another. Gaunt cannot be mistaken for York, nor Bolingbroke for Aumerle. The main contrast between Richard and Bolingbroke — the cousinly opposites — is indicated in their very use of language. Richard's poetry is not action, not even a prelude to action; it is a substitute for action, even an insulation of all possible effective action. With Bolingbroke it is otherwise. He is rhetorical, not poetical, and with him rhetoric is a handmaiden to action; he can be voluble when necessary (as when he wins over York to his side), he is brief in the deposition scene, and he merely throws a hint to Exton to achieve Richard's murder. Bolingbroke is a consummate user of words to gain his particular ends; Richard is a marvellous user of words to confuse both ends and means but leave himself to himself. Bolingbroke wins the throne, but Richard too has won something — the crown of self-knowledge. If legitimacy is not enough, mere ability too is not enough. Richard acts the role of King by Divine Right, Bolingbroke the role of the Efficient King. In both something is lacking, and hence neither exceeds the mere role and becomes the fact. But the protagonist is Richard, not Bolingbroke. Richard's follies in the first half, and his sufferings in the second, are the theme of the play. The King who had trusted too long to Divine Right alone to sustain him asks, when defeat overtakes him, for a mirror — "the double-edged symbol of vanity and truth-telling" (Peter Ure) — to know the false from the true, appearance from reality; and again, some minutes before his death (V.v), finds in music the clue to his life's failure. "The music recalls to his mind", says F. W. Sternfeld, "the universal need for proportion... the soft music of strings becomes a powerful agent in causing Richard to reassess his position and in rousing the compassion of the audience".<sup>23</sup> Richard's belated realisation of the whole truth about himself is both the climax and the end of his sufferings — Wilson

<sup>23</sup> *Music in Shakespearean Tragedy* (1963), p. 202.

Knight thinks that Richard under disaster "becomes almost a saint" — and there is therefore no room now for pity or pathos; indeed he displays sudden energy at long last, kills two of his murderous assailants, and dies (in Exton's words) "as full of valour as of royal blood".

## IV

## 1 AND 2 HENRY IV

The 'action' of *1 Henry IV* is spread over less than a year (i.e. from the Battle of Holmedon in September 1402 to the Battle of Shrewsbury in July 1403). The 'action' continues without a break in Part II, and concludes with Henry IV's death in 1413, thus extending over a period of 10 years. There is a good deal of dramatic telescoping in both the plays, and Shakespeare takes liberties with history with a view to making the 'action' more dramatic. For example, although the Hotspur of History was Bolingbroke's senior by three years and Hal's by twenty-three, Shakespeare creates the impression that Hotspur and Hal are roughly of the same age by decreasing the former's and increasing the latter's years, so that the rivalry between them might be the more marked and Henry IV's jealousy of Northumberland the more understandable. The negotiations between the rebels that actually took many months are concentrated in the play into a matter of a few days. And, of course, Falstaff (although he may ultimately owe somewhat to Sir John Oldecastle the Lollard 'rebel' of history) is almost entirely the darling of Shakespeare's imagination. No wonder he nearly 'steals' the play, or both the plays — and part of *Henry V* too.

The plays raise several questions, and while laboured answers can be (and have been) given, none wholly convinces. The Pirandellian "Right you are, if you think so!" seems under the circumstances the only sensible attitude to adopt. Are Parts I and II two different plays, or only one play in 2 Parts? Johnson said that they are two plays "only because they are too long to be one". The SR entry in 1598 referred to the play simply as 'The History of Henry the IIIth' and not as the First Part of *Henry IV*. The Second Part was entered as such in the SR in

1600, and in 1603 the First Part too was separately listed in the SR. If the 2 themes of the play are (1) civil strife and (2) coldness between father and son, both are worked out to their natural conclusion at the Battle of Shrewsbury. After Shrewsbury, the back of the rebellion was broken; and, again after Shrewsbury, Henry IV could have had no doubts whatsoever either about his son's filial affection or his fitness for kingship. Part II, then, was written as an afterthought; it is less compact, it reopens both the themes, it unfortunately raises more questions than it solves. With only Part I to consider, Falstaff is no puzzle at all. Hotspur and Falstaff polarise two points of view on 'Honour'; Prince Hal includes them both, and also transcends them. He challenges Hotspur to single combat, thereby showing both his heroism and his humanity (for a single combat would avoid needless bloodshed). Once Part II is tacked on to Part I, we are up against the vexed question of the 'dismissal' of Falstaff. Much better to treat the two Parts as two different plays.

While scholars like R. A. Law and Edward Cain hold that Part II is an unpremeditated addition, others like Dover Wilson and Tillyard swear by the unity of *1 and 2 Henry IV*.<sup>24</sup> The two Parts have been produced independently without seriously puzzling the playgoer, and all four plays (from *Richard II* to *Henry V*) were produced as a dramatic sequence at Stratford in the 'Festival of Britain' year (1951) and that was a valid, and an aesthetically satisfying, experience too. In *Richard II*, there are references to "Glendower and his complices" (III. i. 43), to Bolingbroke's "unthrifty son" (V. iii), and to the danger implicit in Northumberland's ardent support to Henry (V. i. 55). These lead up to *1 Henry IV*. Similarly there are links between the first and second Parts of *Henry IV* (the reference to Scroop in IV. iv. and V. iv. 36, the Induction to *2 Henry IV*, Morton's report to Northumberland in I. i, and Henry IV recalling Richard's words about Northumberland in III. i. 70). These are the links, the cross-references, the echoes that hold *1 and 2 Henry IV*, or the entire tetralogy, together.

But it is really a question of the point of view we choose to adopt. (The First Part of *Henry IV* alone could be read as the

<sup>24</sup>R. A. Law in *Studies in Philology* (1927), Edward Cain in *Shakespeare Quarterly* (Jan. 1952), Dover Wilson in *The Fortunes of Falstaff* and Tillyard in *Shakespeare's History Plays*.

'Tragedy of Hotspur'—the tragedy of a man with striking qualities who carried to excess those qualities, making them 'defects' in the process, and so extinguishing him. Much of what Lady Percy saw in him, or what according to her the youth of the time saw in him, he does communicate to the play also.) Thus Lady Percy in 2 *Henry IV* (II. iii. 21) :

He was indeed the glass  
Wherein the noble youth did dress themselves.  
He had no legs that practis'd not his gait ;  
And speaking thick, which nature made his blemish.  
Became the accents of the valiant ;  
... in speech, in gait.  
In diet, in affections of delight,  
In military rules, humours of blood,  
He was the mark and glass, copy and book.  
That fashion'd others...  
O miracle of men !

We can legitimately borrow Bradley's classic enunciation of the sense of 'waste' in tragedy and apply it to Hotspur. He is what Lady Percy describes him to be, and yet why should this 'miracle of men' only throw himself away ?<sup>25</sup>

The Second Part of *Henry IV* alone could be read (or the two Parts could be read together) as the Tragedy of Bolingbroke—the tragedy of 'success' proving mere dead sea-fruit in the end. The same man that charmed the commons and impressed the lords as Bolingbroke now inspires no love, and little loyalty, as King. There is a nerveless inadequacy about the opening line "So shaken as we are, so wan with care" of the First Part, and although he revives spasmodically from time to time, the general effect is one of steady decline. "This tired and impotent king", comments M. M. Reese, and adds :

"This is the man who took a crown because he would bear it better than the king he had deposed ; and the quality of his act is to be judged by his decline from efficiency and decisiveness to the haggard uncertainty in which we find him now".<sup>26</sup>

Like Macbeth, Bolingbroke has also 'murdered' sleep, or has at least frightened it away (Part II, III. i. 6) ; he is uneasy, his body as well as his kingdom are diseased (III. i. 38) :

<sup>25</sup> *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> *The Cease of Majesty*, p. 286.



Then you perceive the body of our kingdom  
How foul it is; what rank diseases grow,  
And with what danger, near the heart of it.

As his enemy, the Archbishop of York, says (IV. i. 207) :

His foes are so enrooted with his friends  
That, plucking to unfix an enemy,  
He doth unfasten so and shake a friend.

The rising star of *Richard II* is the 'vile politician', 'this thorn, this canker, Bolingbroke' of *1 Henry IV* and 'this bare wither'd trunk' of *2 Henry IV*. He is constantly afraid that what chance and guile and cool calculation and the cumulative weakness of his enemies gave him may also be taken away from his House by a like conjunction of circumstances. A thin line divides the tragic hero from becoming almost a figure of comedy. The Cambyzes' vein, the Pyramus pose : how easily a little irreverence, a little humour, can destroy them. So it is with Hotspur's vaulting ambition to pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon which suffers deflation in Falstaff's catechism (Part I, I. iii. 201 and V. i. 130) ; so it is with Henry IV's assumption of divine right, which suffers deflation too when Hotspur tells Sir Walter Blunt (IV. iii. 54) :

My father and my uncle and myself  
Did give him that same royalty he wears.

Falstaff's irreverence and humour alone are enough to 'debunk' the tragic poses, the heroic attitudinisations, of honour-clad honour-mad gunpowder Percy and that sprightly "Scot of Scots, Douglas, that runs o'horseback up a hill perpendicular", 'debunk' too the whole business of conscription and war and cold-blooded policy and tinsel Commodity parading as the gold of patriotism.

Both Henry IV and Falstaff fill the 2 Parts of *Henry IV*. Prince Hal fills it too, and fills *Henry V* also. (Hal's destiny or privilege is to oscillate between the Court of Henry IV and the world of Falstaff, and only once to cross purposefully the glamorous orbit of the 'miracle of men', Hotspur. Hal learns from them all, and within reason admires them all. When he can relax, he will be a Falstaff, crack a joke, empty a bottle, and exchange pulses with 'dear and dogged' humanity ; when

there is a call to arms, he will be a fighter, and out-Hotspur Hotspur too; and as a King he will glibly lisp the alphabet of policy which he has learnt from that 'vile politician', his father, Bolingbroke, thus making use of men to advance his own cause without a too scrupulous care for the morality of the proceedings. Hal is a man, a fighter, and a king, not a saint, nor a paragon, nor a particularly 'good' or 'great' man; he is a wiser and more prudent king than Richard II, he is more warm-hearted than Henry IV, more purposeful than his own son Henry VI, more single-minded than Edward IV, more humane than Richard III—in short, the best of the kings in either of the tetralogies. More than this it was not Shakespeare's intention to claim on behalf of his 'ideal' King. If the Lancastrian tetralogy is read at a stretch, there is no doubt Hal-Harry is the focus of the whole field of forces, the one coherent principle of unity. But as if by a decree of fate, there is another focus too—"unimitated, inimitable Falstaff", who makes himself (again, in Johnson's words) "necessary to the prince". In *Richard II* we first hear of Hal from his own father (V. iii) :

Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son ?  
 'Tis full three months since I did see him last.  
 If any plague hang over us, 'tis he . . .  
 Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,  
 For there, they say, he daily doth frequent  
 With unrestrained loose companions.  
 Even such, they say, as stand in narrow lanes  
 And beat our watch and rob our passengers,  
 Which he, young wanton and effeminate boy,  
 Takes on the point of honour to support  
 So dissolute a crew.

This might be a summary of the Eastcheap-Gadshill scenes in *1 Henry IV*. Falstaff is not mentioned by name, but in retrospect he could be seen as a massive figure among the "so dissolute a crew". If Shakespeare had intended that his Hal-Harry should be the pure heroic hero, the ideal king, it was fatal to have brought him in conjunction with so supreme a sovereign in another sphere—the world of humour and gaiety and laughter. Always just, Johnson refers to Falstaff's "unfailing power of exciting laughter, which is the more freely indulged, as his wit is not of the splendid or ambitious kind, but consists in easy

escapes and sallies of levity, which make sport but raise no envy"). And Johnson judiciously adds: "It must be observed that he is stained with no enormous or sanguinary crimes, so that his licentiousness is not so offensive but that it may be borne for his mirth". (Falstaff may have his sins, but he is no murderer, and he is not even particularly ambitious. There is no doubt at all that Falstaff, not only amuses and delights Prince Hal, but also humanises him and 'educates' him after a fashion. In a sense he prepares the Young Prince for the nuances of fraternisation on the eve of Agincourt (*Henry V*, IV. i. 90ff). It is very difficult, of course, to integrate the Falstaff and the Prince that we see — separately or together — in specific scenes into their total images in Shakespeare's mind. Both Falstaff and Hal are 'compounded of many simples'. If into Falstaff's composition have gone Vice, Riot, Oldeastle, Falstofe, Miles Gloriosus, the stage clown, and the prototypical misleader of youth, into Hal-Harry's composition have gone the traditional image of the riotous youth that mellows into a disciplined leader, the image (given in Elyot's *Governor*) of the Prince being committed by the Lord Chief Justice, the image of the Morality tradition of Magnificence, the image of the Aristotelean Golden Mean, and the image of the miraculous victor of Agincourt. We are pulled this way or that, now by the Romantic critics, now by the historical realists. Ever since Morgann wrote in 1774 —

"... we can scarcely forgive the ingratitude of the Prince in the new-born virtue of the King, and we curse the severity of that poetic justice which consigns our old good-natured delightful companion to the custody of the warden, and the dishonours of the *Fleet*".—

this debate has assumed the proportions of the Wars of the Roses, and Bosworth is nowhere in sight. Bradley thinks that, by giving to Falstaff "the inexplicable touch of infinity which he bestowed on Hamlet and Macbeth and Cleopatra, but denied to Henry the Fifth", Shakespeare really "overreached himself"—in other words, landed himself in a confusion of dramatic ends and means. Dover Wilson would, if he could, mediate between the Morgann-Bradley and the very modern interpretations. But while his heart is with Morgann, his analytical mind is with modern critics like Stoll.<sup>27</sup> Falstaff himself might exclaim (*2 Henry IV*, I. ii. 6):

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter VIII of E. E. Stoll's *Shakespeare Studies* (1927).

Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me. The brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that intends to laughter, more than I invent or is invented on me.

Falstaff tells many a lie, but (in Alexander's words) "he is not the victim of his own story; and if others are simple enough to believe it, that is but an added jest. The lie is not in his soul".<sup>28</sup> It is easy to summon witnesses to depose against Falstaff, yet these same witnesses — when speaking from the heart — tell a different story. Thus Hal himself: "I could have better spared a better man" (*1 Henry IV*, V. iv. 104). Thus even the Hostess (*2 Henry IV*, II. iv. 368):

I have known thee these twenty-nine years, come peascod-time; but an honest and truer-hearted man — well, fare thee well.

She says again, after Falstaff's death (*Henry V*, II. iii. 9):

Nay, sure, he's not in hell; he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. 'A made a finer end, and went away an it had been any christom child

There is a tremendous near-absolute quality about these asseverations which Shakespeare certainly wants us to take seriously. Nay more: there is even a hint of the cause — at least the immediate cause — of Falstaff's death. Nym says that "the King hath run bad humours on the night"; and Pistol adds: "Nym, thou hast spoke the right; his heart is fractured and corroborate" (*Henry V*, II. i. 118). These are simple common people who have known both Falstaff and the Prince, and their verdict is that for Falstaff's death the King is to blame. Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia so that the expedition to Troy may materialise; and Henry V as good as sacrifices Falstaff so that he may be auspiciously inducted into the high and cold formalities of kingcraft.<sup>29</sup> It was probably necessary that Henry V should 'dismiss' Falstaff. "I am sworn brother, sweet", the deposed Richard tells his wife, "to grim Necessity; and he and I will

<sup>28</sup> *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 122.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. J. I. M. Stewart: "I suggest that Hal, by a displacement common enough in the evolution of ritual, kills Falstaff instead of killing the king, his father. In a sense Falstaff is his father; certainly is a 'father-substitute' in the psychologist's word; and this makes the theory of a vicarious sacrifice the more colourable" (*Character and Motive in Shakespeare*, 1949, p. 138).

keep a league till death" (V. i. 20). When his cue comes, Henry IV echoes similar sentiments (Part II, III. i. 92):

Are these things then necessities?  
Then let us meet them like necessities;  
And that same word even now cries out on us.

Commodity and Necessity rule princes no less than people, and Hal wasn't his father's son for nothing. But to gild the action with the gold of noble purpose, — and to berate Falstaff so that Hal's action may be applauded with the easier conscience, — is surely repugnant to Shakespeare's own imaginative presentation of these two characters.

Falstaff is condemned by his critics because, among other things, he is a liar and a coward. But if he lies, "the lie is not in his soul", for he seldom lies to himself; he can, in fact, face the truth about himself (*1 Henry IV*, III. iii. 164):

Dost thou hear, Hal? Thou knowest in the state of innocence Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty.

He's a coward too, because when he finds that he has to fight Douglas, he "falls down as if he were dead"; but when things go ill with the rebels, Douglas himself takes to his heels and is overtaken. Great Hector was pursued by Achilles three times round the walls of Troy before he would turn back and give fight to his enemy. Falstaff's 'vices' and 'weaknesses' are never glossed over either by Shakespeare or by himself; and his friends and enemies, of course, constantly exaggerate them. The impression is created that, whatever may happen, whether his habitat is Eastcheap or a battlefield, Falstaff knows the art of survival. He will never say die, he will not allow anybody to get the better of him in debate. How, then, does he manage to die at all? The obvious explanation is that he didn't die, — it was the King that killed him. Or rather it was Shakespeare that made the King kill Falstaff: and why? Quiller-Couch answers as follows:

"Shakespeare killed Falstaff because he couldn't help it... as between two mortal men of this world, Henry was the wronger, Falstaff the wronged... Wisely or not — wisely, if we will — Henry had hurt Falstaff

to death : and not for any *new* default, sin or crime ; but for continuing to be, in fault and foible, the very same man in whose faults and foibles he had delighted as a friend".<sup>30</sup>

Falstaff's surrendering to the call of affection has, in a way, been his undoing ; he has survived many jolts, many buffets, but the brutality of Hal's behaviour has made Falstaff's heart "fracted and corroborate". And Henry is henceforth free to play the role of Patriot King and Herculean Hero, while the attenuated comic spirit will confine its furtive movements to the periphery of the action. The inevitable aesthetic result is, in Rossiter's words,

"In *Henry V* ... Whatever he (Shakespeare) once intended (and that last speech, by the Dancer, in *2 Henry IV*, does show the *intention* to export Falstaff to France), what he produced was a propaganda-play on National Unity : heavily orchestrated for the brass. The sounding — and very impressive — Rhetoric shows how something is being stifled. The war-time values demand a determined 'one-eyedness' ; the King fails to reach the fullest humanity because of that demand. He *has* banished Plump Jack ; and 'all the World' has been banished with him. At least, the 'Allness' is gone. The play is fracted and corroborate".<sup>31</sup>

~ (Leaving Falstaff aside (but that is casting 'all the World' aside!), what is the 'action' of *Henry IV*? From *all the World* we now enter the constricted world of politics, Commodity and circumspection. If power corrupts, the means pursued to attain or retain power also corrupt ; and rebellion is a self-generating and fast rotting process. The fitful fever of life ended, Richard sleeps well ; Bolingbroke is King ; but there is no peace for him. Conspiracy follows conspiracy, and still he cannot reach the last of them. The developing political situation in *1 and 2 Henry IV* is an accurate fulfilment of Richard's prophetic admonition to Northumberland (V.i. 55):

Northumberland, thou ladder wherewithal  
The mounting Bolingbroke ascends my throne,  
The time shall not be many hours of age  
More than it is, ere foul sin gathering head  
Shall break into corruption. Thou shalt think  
Though he divide the realm and give thee half  
It is too little, helping him to all ;

<sup>30</sup> *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, p. 122.

<sup>31</sup> *Angel with Horns*, pp. 57-8.

And he shall think that thou, which knowest the way  
 To plant unrightful kings, wilt know again,  
 Being ne'er so little urg'd, another way  
 To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne.  
 The love of wicked men converts to fear;  
 That fear to hate; and hate turns one or both  
 To worthy danger and deserved death.

The Percies (Northumberland, Worcester and Harry Hotspur) are quick to resent slights the moment Henry is King indeed, and the King too is only too ready to fear their combined strength. Cataloguing the rebels' grievances, Hotspur tells Blunt that the King

Knows at what time to promise, when to pay ...  
 Disgrac'd me in my happy victories;  
 Sought to entrap me by intelligence;  
 Rated mine uncle from the council-board;  
 In rage dismiss'd my father from the court;  
 Broke oath on oath, committed wrong on wrong.

Clear-headed, Henry is fully conscious of his guilt; "God knows, my son", he tells Hal (Part II, IV. v. 185),

By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways  
 I met this crown; and I myself know well  
 How troublesome it sat upon my head ...  
 And I had many living to upbraid  
 My gain of it by their assistances;  
 Which daily grew to quarrel and to bloodshed,  
 Wounding supposed peace ...  
 For all my reign hath been but as a scene  
 Acting that argument.)

In Part II, we see moral corruption claiming authority and rebellion alike till we can hardly say which is which, or which is more corrupt. The King dissipatedly acknowledges to Warwick (III. i. 38):

Then you perceive the body of our kingdom  
 How foul it is; what rank diseases grow,  
 And with what danger, near the heart of it.

Archbishop Scroop tells Westmoreland (IV. i. 54):

We are all diseas'd  
 And with our surfeiting and wanton hours

Have brought ourselves into a burning fever,  
And we must bleed for it ; of which disease  
Our late King, Richard, being infected, died.

The Plague struck Richard first (or, before him, Woodstock), and since then it has been raging. The fury not yet spent.) And so, in Part II, Scroop and Mowbray (son of the nobleman banished by Richard along with Bolingbroke) are deceitfully seized and executed by Prince John of Lancaster, Henry's younger son. And there is also a reference to the death of Glendower (III. i. 103) and the defeat of Northumberland and Lord Bardolph by the "shrieve of Yorkshire" (IV. iv. 97). The rebels account in all for 9 out of the 14 years of Henry IV's reign, and just when the chapter of rebellion is really about to close, it is already too late for him to enjoy the fruits of peace (IV. iv. 102). The paths of sinful ambition must inevitably lead through the bogs and quagmires of frustration and end in the wages of an early death.

*2 Henry IV* seems, on the whole, looser in construction than its predecessor. It has the limitations of a play meant to be a sequel to a 'popular' play, and besides its action lacks a clear focus. What is the play about? Whether we consider the rebellion, the Falstaff theme, or the father-son relationship, we constantly keep referring back to *1 Henry IV* for comparison and contrast. At the low-comedy side there is the Shallow-Silence interlude, and we are duly thankful; at the political level there is John's devilishly competent handling of Scroop, Mowbray and Hastings, — but surely Shakespeare doesn't expect us to endorse this sharp practice either politically or morally. The Shallow-Falstaff duet is in a much more subdued key when we compare it with some of the Harry-Falstaff exchanges in *1 Henry IV*, but this is nothing to the contrast between John's handling of the rebels with Harry's. John's repulsive sanctimoniousness and cold-blooded ruthlessness almost offer a justification for Worcester's decision in *1 Henry IV* not to accept the King's offer of peace with honour. Nothing that a Falstaff ever did, or might do, could infect the moral world to the extent John of Lancaster's 'policy' in the name of "a most Christian care" destroys the foundations of faith. Just as, in *1 Henry IV*, Prince Hal's purposeful valour on the battlefield is contrasted with Hotspur's



'romantic' absorption in 'Honour', can it be that Shakespeare now intends John to be a foil to Hal — John's inhuman calculation and treachery contrasted with Hal's chivalry towards Hotspur and generosity towards Douglas? As usual it is Falstaff's role to play the Comic Chorus here as elsewhere. There is something indeed inhuman and fiendish about John's "bloodless victory", but we are glad that, with Falstaff still improvising his seductive prose rhythms, we can assure ourselves that we aren't in one of the deeper circles of Hell but only here on this familiar earth — a flawed earth may be, yet a solid firm earth — instinct with humour and gaiety and wit and laughter. John has just left having told Falstaff (IV. iii. 83) :

I, in my condition,  
Shall better speak of you than you deserve.

And Falstaff soliloquises :

I would you had but the wit; 'twere better than your dukedom. Good faith, this same young sober-blooded boy doth not love me; nor a man cannot make him laugh — but that's no marvel; he drinks no wine. There's none of these demure boys come to any proof; for thin drink doth so over-cool their blood, and making many fish-meals, that they fall into a kind of green-sickness; and then, when they marry, they get wenches. They are generally fools and cowards — which some of us should be too, but for inflammation ... Hereof comes it that Prince Harry is valiant; for the cold blood he did naturally inherit of his father, he hath, like lean, sterile, and bare land, manured, husbanded, and till'd, with excellent endeavour of drinking good and good store of fertile sherris, that he is become very hot and valiant.

This is magnificent, the prose as well as Falstaff's genuine feeling for Hal. As Henry V, Hal may later drive Falstaff to a "fracted and corroborate" heart, but Falstaff really loves Hal and applauds him as a warm-blooded hero and human being. *2 Henry IV*, in some respects, is a link-play; it is less a sequel to *1 Henry IV* than a bridge between *1 Henry IV* and *Henry V*. For the 'emergence' of Henry V the destined victor of Agincourt, the 'exposure' of John, the death of Henry IV, and the 'dismissal' of Falstaff are all necessary. And all have been attended to with clean despatch in *2 Henry IV*. Perhaps, even Hal's opening soliloquy in *1 Henry IV* (I. ii. 88ff), if it is not to convict him of criminal hypocrisy, should be taken as part of

the propagandist intention behind *Henry V* — as something that was deliberately added to link the wayward Hal to the masterful king to be. Like the choruses and several other passages in *Henry V*, Hal's early soliloquy too is informative and rhetorical rather than revelatory and dramatic.

## V

## HENRY V

Concluding his perceptive study of *Henry IV*, Gareth Lloyd Evans makes the following observations :

"In *Henry IV* the interplay of natural and political, of comic and serious, of private and public, not only suggests the emergence of new dimensions in Shakespeare's plays, but makes of history much more than a chronicle tapestry. It implies an attitude towards the dramatic presentation of life that sees things not in terms of one-dimensional historical narrative, varied by dissociated areas of comic and tragic action and character, but strictly as a unity of comical-tragical-historical".<sup>32</sup>

If so, the next (and last) play in the tetralogy is a relapse into an earlier mode ; it is more of a chronicle tapestry, more obviously one-dimensional, than *1 and 2 Henry IV*. In these latter, the tragical-heroical Hotspur, the tragical-historical Bolingbroke, the comical Falstaff, and the comical-heroical-historical Hal hold the delicate balance of interests, and make the drama multi-dimensional, complex, 'ambivalent' (Rossiter's word), yet on the whole a unity in diversity, the recordation of a vision of a significant section of English history. The 'new dimensions' are by no means 'lost', for they are carried to *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and the plays of Shakespeare's full maturity. But in the two plays that have special affiliations with *Henry IV* — in other words, *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* — either the historical element alone or the comical element alone receives emphasis : the historical inflated into the heroic and the comical deflated into the farcical ; the 'tragic' (except where there is the reference to Falstaff's death in *Henry V*) has no place at all.

Henry V's was a brief reign, from 1413 to 1422. He left for

<sup>32</sup> *Early Shakespeare* (Ed. by J. R. Brown and Bernard Harris), p. 163.

France in August 1415, and advanced against Harfleur ; although he entered the town at last, the siege exhausted his army, which also suffered heavily through disease. He accordingly decided to march to the coast. Opposed by a French force that heavily outnumbered his own, he had either to capitulate or to fight. His decision to fight proved wise, for he scored a great victory at Agincourt. Historically, after the failure of the negotiations at Calais in 1416, there was a further invasion followed by the capture of Rouen, the campaign in Normandy, the signing of the Treaty of Troyes in 1420 and Henry's marriage to Katherine the princess of France. During the renewed invasion of France in 1422, Henry died there, while Katherine gave birth to his heir — the future Henry VI — at Windsor. Shakespeare, however, considerably simplifies the action by bridging the gap of 5 years between the first French war and the Treaty of 1420, making the Treaty of Troyes and the marriage follow close upon the Battle of Agincourt.

The crown has descended on Henry V, as his father had anticipated, "with better quiet, better opinion, better confirmation"; yet the "soil of the achievement" cannot be wholly exorcised away. He has also had to commence his reign with a 'crime' — a crime against elemental human decency — by 'dismissing' his bosom-friend of many years with the brutally curt "I know thee not, old man". The rejection may be politically necessary, yet it offends against the unwritten laws of human comradeship, even as Orestes' matricide, although carried out in obedience to Apollo's command, remains a horrible crime. We are not allowed to forget Henry's act of rejection, though the fat Knight himself is there no more in the flesh (and what a Himalaya of flesh). The Hostess' account in II. ii of Falstaff's death is the one genuinely human touch grazing the tragic in this essentially politically conceived dramatic pageant. Even in France, the incredible Fluellen manages to keep Falstaff's memory alive by drawing a comparison between Alexander of Macedon and Harry of Monmouth (IV. vii. 42) :

I speak but in the figures and comparisons of it ; as Alexander kill'd his friend Cleitus, so also Harry Monmouth, being in his right wits and his good judgements, turn'd away the fat knight with the great belly doublet.

Alexander the 'Pig' compared with King Henry — the Prig? Shakespeare is indeed just, he will do his best to present a heroic Harry, but he cannot forget the little lapse — his or Harry's, it doesn't matter — and he will not allow us to forget it either. Towards the end of his detailed study of the Lancastrian tetralogy, Derek Traversi makes this important point :

"As the play proceeds, Henry seems to be increasingly, at least in a moral sense, the victim of his position . . . Moral principle, coming into contact with political reality, translates itself — in its own despite — into a question of expediency ; and it is expediency, the condition of successful leadership aiming at an end recognised to be desirable, which is the touchstone of Henry's conduct".<sup>33</sup>

In the *New Arden* edition of the play, J. H. Walter (p. xxvi) comments as follows on the effect Falstaff's "linen end" — a Christian end, crying out 'God, God, God' three or four times, according to the Hostess — has on the general tone of the play :

"The play gains in epic strength and dignity from Falstaff's death, even as the *Aeneid* gains from Dido's death, not only because both accounts are written from the heart with a beauty and power that have moved men's hearts in after time, but because Dido and Falstaff are sacrifices to a larger morality they both ignore".

Henry is like a man who has been persuaded to marry a rich heiress whom he can at best tolerate in preference to the girl he has loved not wisely but too well but whom he must now abandon. Under the circumstances Henry does his best ; we can admire him ; we can even sympathise with his hard lot in life ; but something has gone out of him that once compelled a superlatively selfish Falstaff himself to love him.

The scheme of *Henry V* is simplicity itself. The war with France is determined on in Act I, the embarkation for France (after the quick liquidation of the conspirators) takes place in Act II, the storming of Harfleur is achieved in Act III, the Battle of Agincourt is fought and won in the all-important Act IV, while Act V comprises what Thomas Hardy would have called 'Aftercourses' — well, a sort of anticlimax. Henry is no tragic hero devoured by an 'inner' struggle ; nor does he seem to be aware at any time of a tragic sense of doom or waste or personal

<sup>33</sup> *Shakespeare : From 'Richard II' to 'Henry V'* (1957), pp. 177, 185.

insufficiency. If expediency erodes his moral sense, it does so gradually and almost imperceptibly. In the opening scene, Bishop and Archbishop while duly sensible of their own interests vie with each other to shower encomiums on the new King. Thus the Archbishop (I. i. 32) :

Never was such a sudden scholar made ;  
 Never came reformation in a flood,  
 With such a heady currance, scouring faults ;  
 Nor never Hydra-headed wilfulness  
 So soon did lose his seat, and all at once,  
 As in this king.

In I. ii, Canterbury discourses learnedly and eloquently on "the law Salique", and tries to convince the King that he has every right to lay claim to France, and even put his claim to the arbitrament of war. Henry is anxious to create the impression that he is no Turkish potentate —

Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds,  
 But Harry Harry

(2 *Henry IV.* V. ii. 48) —

but a Christian king, taking counsel from his advisers and always bearing in mind the total welfare of the commonwealth. The Dauphin's insulting message, backed by the present of tennis-balls, gives an edge to Henry's decision to fight. There is, of course, the late King's dying advice to Harry (2 *Henry IV.*, IV. v. 214) :

Be it thy course to busy giddy minds  
 With foreign quarrels, that action, hence borne out,  
 May waste the memory of the former days.

The ambitious nobles were really gangs of fighting animals, and some outlet had to be found for their abundant surplus energies ! Must we suppose, then, that Henry took this advice seriously, revived the old half-dead contention with France, bribed the clergy into supporting him by agreeing to soft-pedal the Bill in the Commons that sought to make the Church "lose the better half of our possession" (I. i. 8), and, in short, embarked on an unscrupulous war employing unscrupulous means ? "If this is a just interpretation", writes M. M. Reese, "Henry is beyond

our pardon. The idea of the godly ruler fails at once, and all the later heroism and fair words and gallant comradeship in battle cannot gild the fault. Henry's reformation would be mere expediency, and Shakespeare's picture of him as the mirror of all Christian kings would be a shocking irony".<sup>34</sup> What is the truth about the matter? Is it different from the appearance? Or is Shakespeare's attitude a little 'ambivalent'?

These things, as Lady Macbeth might put it, "must not be thought after these ways: so, it will make us mad". Let us follow the story: in II. i, Henry is quite the masterful King. He orders Uncle Exeter to release the man "that rail'd against our person". This provokes chaste protests from Cambridge,<sup>35</sup> Scroop and Grey, and by sleight of hand Henry turns this against them, and so these conspirators go to their death. The sugar plum in one hand, the scourging rod in the other; but the stern necessity that demands such ruthlessness also sobers and saddens him a little. When he says (II. ii. 189) —

let us deliver  
Our puissance into the hands of God,  
Putting it straight in expedition —

as when he says later (III. vi. 164; IV. viii. 104) —

We are in God's hand, brother, not theirs.  
March to the bridge ...

O God, thy arm was here!  
And not to us, but to thy arm alone.  
Ascribe we all ... Take it, God,  
For it is none but thine —

there is more than mere sanctimoniousness; there is also the touch of humility engendered by the endless need to safeguard himself and his throne from the traitor at home and the enemy abroad. In the low-comedy scenes, Pistol (he has married the Hostess, but she will be dead before the end of the play!) and Bardolph are the sole survivors from the Falstaff gang, while the

<sup>34</sup> *The Cease of Majesty*, p. 323.

<sup>35</sup> Richard, Earl of Cambridge, was the second son of the Duke of York who played so irresolute a part in *Richard II.* Richard's son, Richard Plantagenet, will later rebel against Henry V's son, Henry VI; and Richard Crookback, his grandson, will kill both Henry VI and his son Prince Edward. Such is the chain of Nemesis in the two tetralogies.

new arrivals are an odd assortment made up of Pym, Fluellen, Macmarris, and other common soldiers. They jest and crack jokes and mutter curses and utter loud imprecations; but the humour now is of the scent-in-the-bottle variety, something evanescent and cheap, not perennial in its undertones.

In III. ii, Henry talks noble verse and talks at length, claiming that the name 'soldier' becomes him best; he articulates Hitler-like fulminations against the Governor and citizens of Harfleur and threatens them with dire consequences should they persist in defending their town:

If I begin the batt'ry once again,  
I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur  
Till in her ashes she lie buried.  
The gates of mercy shall be all shut up.  
And the flesh'd soldier, rough and hard of heart.  
In liberty of bloody hand shall range  
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass  
Your fresh fair virgins and your flow'ring infants ...

(John before Angiers, in comparison, was a mere amateur!) Actually, when in response to his threats the city surrenders, he directs Exeter to "use mercy to them all". Although Henry can be ruthless, he is no sadist. On the other hand, the best in him comes out when the fortunes of the war seem to go against him. Now he becomes human once more, his actions are governed by humility as well as self-assurance, and out of the fire and brimstone of Agincourt he emerges a true leader of men. His Eastcheap apprenticeship enables him to play Haroun-al-Rashid in his camp on the eve of Agincourt, and when he talks to Bates the obscure — the unknown soldier — under the double cover of darkness and disguise, something of the old 'charmer' Hal is revealed again (IV. i. 100):

I think the King is but a man as I am: the violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions; his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man ...

(Lear says, looking at the Beldam Beggar: "... unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art".) Extremity gives Henry a new sensibility, a new

insight, and his soliloquy is one of the best things in the play (IV. i. 240) :

O Ceremony, show me but thy worth !  
What is thy soul of adoration ?  
Art thou aught else but place, degree, and form.  
Creating awe and fear in other men ? . . .  
What drink'st thou oft, instead of homage sweet,  
But poison'd flattery ?

Then he remembers Richard's deposition and death, and he manages to impart a due sincerity into his prayer :

Not today, O Lord,  
O, not today, think not upon the fault  
My father made in compassing the crown !  
I Richard's body have interred new,  
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears  
Than from it issued forced drops of blood . . .  
Though all that I can do is nothing worth,  
Since that my penitence comes after all,  
Imploring pardon.

The Battle of Agincourt turns overwhelmingly in his favour, and, like Themistocles after Salamis, Henry too readily ascribes the victory to God. There is no doubt that the enemy, with his presumption and frivolity, deserved the defeat as much as Henry deserved his victory. 'Non nobis' and 'Te Deum' are sung, and Henry and his band of brothers march to Calais, and "to England then".

We needn't be detained by the incredible last Act, where the victorious King is shown wooing Katherine of France much as the cave man might have wooed his coy Eve. At any rate, it has all ended happily ; the French King has agreed to disinherit the Dauphin in favour of Henry V (even as one day — a singular act of Nemesis — Henry VI is to disinherit *his* son in favour of the Duke of York) ; and the hero of Agincourt and Troyes orders preparations for his marriage with the Princess of France.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE YORKIST TETRALOGY

#### I

##### 1 HENRY VI

Whether the 3 Parts of *Henry VI* were written in the present order one after another or the first was written last, whether Shakespeare was responsible for the entire trilogy or took over earlier plays and licked them into their present shape, the fact is that all three Parts were included by Heinige and Condell in the First Folio, they fit neatly into a broad scheme of history plays embracing a time-stretch from 1398 to 1485, and there is nothing in the plays that Shakespeare could not have written in his 'nonage' as a playwright. Although Greene is usually mentioned as the probable original author of 2 and 3 *Henry VI*, he was certainly no good plotter, as may be seen from the plays that were unquestionably his; and hence Peter Alexander rightly argues (in his Introduction to the plays) that "to suppose Shakespeare had to learn from Greene an art that Greene never possessed himself in any notable degree seems inadmissible". With regard to the 'dating' of the plays, we seem to be on surer ground when we say that the Yorkist tetralogy preceded the Lancastrian, for apart from 'external' evidence (which is scanty), the style, versification, and other 'internal' evidence seem to indicate their immaturity. Of course it is possible, as suggested by Tillyard, that the plays from *Richard II* to *Henry V* were really written before the *Henry VI* trilogy and *Richard III* (providing matter for the shortened *Famous Histories of Henry V*) and later fully revised as we have them now. This however, is mere speculation. On the other hand, there is

advantage in following the historical sequence rather than the order of actual composition of the plays.

The 3 Parts of *Henry VI* survey English history from Henry V's funeral in 1422 to the Battle of Tewkesbury in 1471. A further breakdown would be as follows: Part I—1422-1445; Part II—1445-1455; and Part III—1455 (or 1460)-1471. While faithful generally to his sources—Hall, Holinshed, *A Mirror for Magistrates*—Shakespeare was not squeamish about taking liberties with them when he thought that his dramatic or moral scheme demanded them. The crowded years of English and French history are drilled into some sort of pattern. Fewer battles are shown than actually took place. In *1 Henry VI*, Joan of Arc's career is stretched over many years, whereas historically it had but the effect of lightning, suddenly illuminating the murky surroundings and as suddenly being put out or lost. She appeared in 1429, and was burnt in 1431. "In one year of glory and one year of martyrdom", writes G. M. Trevelyan, "Joan of Arc evoked a national tradition and sentiment in France which has never since looked back".<sup>1</sup> Of this there is little evidence in Shakespeare's play. He preferred to present her as an agent of evil,—as the malignant power pitted against England's champion, Talbot. With a view to highlighting the Joan-Talbot struggle, which is symbolic both of the France-England and of the Evil-Good antinomies, Shakespeare contracts Talbot's career even as he extends Joan's. Though he died 22 years after Joan, in the play Joan witnesses his death and mocks at it (IV.vii.72). When the play opens in Westminster Abbey, with Bedford leading the lamentation—

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!  
Comets, importing change of times and states,  
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky  
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars  
That have consented unto Henry's death!—

promptly comes a Messenger with joyful news (I.i.58):

Sad tidings bring I to you out of France,  
Of loss, of slaughter, and discomfiture:  
Guienne, Champagne, Rheims, Orleans,  
Paris, Guysors, Poitiers, are all quite lost.

<sup>1</sup> *A Shortened History of England* (Pelican Book). p. 188.

The losses, of course, didn't follow so precipitately the premature death of Henry V, but this trick of dramatic accentuation through the compression of events into a narrow space was quite legitimate, and Shakespeare resorted to it more than once.

From Henslowe we learn that *I Henry VI* was produced at the Rose Theatre in 1592. Almost certainly it must have been presented first years earlier. At the time it seems to have been a very popular play, for Nashe has recorded that the bones of 'brave Talbot' had been "new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators (at several times)". Though a young man's play, *I Henry VI* doesn't suffer on account of its plotting. In fact, H. T. Price, in his *Construction in Shakespeare* (1951), has singled out the opening scene — "a scene full of matter and incident, condensed, swift, and clear, imposing as a stage spectacle" — for special praise; and the 'exposition' is so vivid and sure that the 'end' is almost implicit in the 'beginning'. It is what may be called a play full of variety and excitement asking for full-blooded acting.

The Chorus at the end of *Henry V* prepares the reader for the *Henry VI* plays :

Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crown'd king  
Of France and England, did this king succeed;  
Whose state so many had the managing  
That they lost France and made his England bleed.

Alas for "this star of England", the victorious Harry; for his reign was to prove shorter than even his father's. When he died in 1422, his son was but 9 months old, and succeeded him as Henry VI. The Duke of Gloucester — the 'Good' Duke Humphrey — became Lord Protector, while another uncle, the Duke of Bedford (John of Lancaster in *Henry IV*), became Regent of France.

The reign of the child king, Henry VI, begins with bad omens. His uncle, Gloucester, and his great-uncle, Henry Beaufort the Bishop of Winchester (later the Cardinal), exchange unseemly words before the Abbey. While Gloucester charges Beaufort as being avaricious, ambitious and vindictive, the latter answers back (I. i. 39) :

Thy wife is proud; she holdeth thee in awe  
More than God or religious churchmen may.

The reference to the Duchess is important, because she is to play such a fatal role in bringing about the 'fall' of her husband in 2 *Henry VI*. As Bedford tries to pacify Gloucester and Beaufort ("Cease, cease these jars and rest your minds in peace"), the Messengers from France bring their budget of bad news — cities have fallen, France has revolted, the Dauphin has been crowned, Talbot has been taken prisoner. Thus unity at home and honour abroad are both dead with the death of Henry V. In 1 *Henry VI*, the war in France and the squabbles at home fill the canvas, and what unites the two themes is the fate of England, the health of *Respublica* of the Morality tradition. Of the two protagonists in the French scenes, Joan la Pucelle (Joan of Arc) is presented with many coarse but also some heroic touches, while Lord Talbot is portrayed as the dare-devil soldier on the English side, the 'valiant Talbot' who "above human thought" enacts "wonders with the sword and lance" (I. i. 121). As against the Gloucester-Beaufort strife which threatens to overwhelm *Respublica*, a very different scene is enacted before Orleans in France. Joan infuses Charles and the French with a new strength of purpose which makes new men of them (I. ii. 129) :

Assign'd am I to be the English scourge.  
 This night the siege assuredly I'll raise ...  
 Glory is like a circle in the water,  
 Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself  
 Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought.  
 With Henry's death the English circle ends ;  
 Dispersed are the glories it included.

The quarrel in England between the 2 Lancastrian lords, Gloucester and Beaufort, is matched in France by the fall of Orleans : a double disaster for *Respublica*.

Act II introduces a new sinister element with vast potentialities. In the 'Temple Garden' scene (II. iv), a personal quarrel between Richard Plantagenet and the Earl of Somerset makes them impulsively pluck a white and a red rose respectively from the garden briar, thus giving a start to the two factions, Yorkist and Lancastrian. Warwick, who backs Richard, says with something like prescience :

this brawl today,  
Grown to this faction in the Temple Garden,  
Shall send between the Red Rose and the White  
A thousand souls to death and deadly night.

In II. v, Richard receives at the Tower his uncle the dying Mortimer's blessings. Mortimer connects with the Percy rebellion in *1 Henry IV*, for the Percies really hoped to place Mortimer on the throne; Richard himself is the son of the Duke of Cambridge, executed for treason in *Henry V* and grandson of the Duke of York who figured in *Richard II*, while Somerset is John of Gaunt's grandson, and Beaufort's nephew. Thus, by the end of Act II, all three issues are joined: England-France, Lancaster-York, and Gloucester-Beaufort. Just as microbes divide and multiply, strife too differentiates and multiplies endlessly.

Act III shows how the relations between Gloucester and Beaufort have worsened a good deal, their retainers behaving no better than the Montagues and Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*. The baby King has in the meantime grown up, and tries his ineffectual hand at making peace between the factions. In this confusion of aims, Richard is quietly — and almost unanimously — inducted into his Yorkist title and patrimony. In France, after a set-back, Joan is on the ascendent again, and wins Burgandy over to the French side. When Henry VI is crowned in Paris, Talbot is the hero (III. iv):

this arm hath reclaim'd  
To our obedience fifty fortresses,  
Twelve cities, and seven walled towns of strength.  
Beside five hundred prisoners of esteem.

Henry makes him the Earl of Shrewsbury, and gives him a place in his coronation, but the feud of the Roses has already taken a foothold even in France. The King would fain make peace between these cousins (York and Somerset) too, as he had earlier tried to pacify the uncles, but he is also frankly puzzled by this lunacy among men (IV. i. 111):

Good Lord, what madness rules in brainsick men,  
When for so slight and frivolous a cause  
Such factious emulations shall arise!

He divides the overall military control in France between York and Somerset, while leaving Talbot in actual charge of the opera-

tions. The immediate result is the failure of York and Somerset to provide Talbot with reinforcements, and so Talbot as well as his brave son become casualties of the war. In Act V, the Pope himself initiates proposals for peace between France and England, and this too is to Henry VI's liking :

I always thought  
It was both impious and unnatural  
That such immanity and bloody strife  
Should reign among the professors of one faith.

Joan loses her power, and is to be burnt ; but this is no advantage to the English. Beaufort (who has purchased a Cardinal's Hat), Gloucester, Suffolk, York, all pull in different directions. Suffolk gains a sudden ascendancy by persuading Henry that he should marry Margaret, daughter of the impoverished Reignier, rather than the daughter of the Earl of Armagnac, proposed by Gloucester. However, a peace is patched up between Henry and Charles of France, which leaves the form of victory with the former, the substance with the latter.

*I Henry VI* is (in Tillyard's words) "the work of an ambitious and reflective young man who has the power to plan but not worthily to execute something great".<sup>2</sup> It is not the plotting but the poetry that fails him. While to the English Joan is but "devil or devil's dam", "a witch", and "that railing Hecate", she is another St. Denis to the French, and Charles says that she shall be "France's saint" (I. vi. 29). French and English alike, these were Joan's contemporaries, and judged her as her actions affected them. By the time Joan is taken prisoner by York (V. iii. 30), the stage is set for the involvement of another Frenchwoman, Margaret of Anjou, in the fortunes of England (V. iii. 45). Suffolk is bewitched by her, as the English thought the French had been bewitched by Joan. He at once conceives the idea of promoting her marriage to Henry VI—"Tush, that's a wooden thing" (V. iii. 89). And he persuades her, her father, and (later) Henry that such an alliance would be most desirable. But what are his own secret plans? The final lines in the play are given to him :

Thus Suffolk hath prevail'd ; and thus he goes,  
As did the youthful Paris once to Greece,

<sup>2</sup> *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 163.

With hope to find the like event in love  
 But prosper better than the Troyan did.  
 Margaret shall now be Queen, and rule the King;  
 And I will rule both her, the King, and realm.

The whole thing moves as it were with an inevitable momentum, and hence it is not necessary to assume that the last scene in *1 Henry VI*, where Suffolk reports to Henry about Margaret's charms, must have been inserted as an afterthought to connect it with the opening scene of *2 Henry VI*, where Margaret, having just been escorted by Suffolk from France, joins her husband.

In *1 Henry VI*, Shakespeare is at pains to show how, although the war in France (the primary theme) has its vicissitudes — for example, Orleans is taken and lost by the French, Rouen is lost and recovered by the English on the same day, — it is the French that are steadily gaining the upper hand. Salisbury has fallen, Bedford is dead, the Talbots are no more. Presently, in *2 Henry VI*, the scene will shift entirely to England. We have seen that *1 Henry VI* starts with two conflicts: the *external* conflict between France and England and the *internal* conflict between Beaufort and Gloucester. By the end of the play, the first (external) conflict has practically ceased, and its place has been taken by the conflict of the Roses. In *2 Henry VI*, the Beaufort-Gloucester conflict will proliferate with the Somerset-York conflict, and before we reach the end of the play the conflict of the Roses alone will dominate the scene. This will work itself out in all its fury in *3 Henry VI*. In the meantime, the theme of incipient illicit love between Suffolk and Margaret too has been unobtrusively slipped into the main stream of the action, to poison the waters still more and make them eddy the more furiously still.

## II

### 2 HENRY VI

As Suffolk presents Margaret to her royal husband, he can hardly hide his sense of elation. The King is overjoyed, and the assembled lords kneel to her. But the 'articles of contracted peace' which Suffolk has brought hardly enthuse Gloucester,

Salisbury, Warwick, York and the rest. It is not only a dowrless marriage, it is also likely to prove a disastrous marriage. But Henry himself is very well satisfied with the match, and confers a Dukedom on Suffolk. Left to themselves, the lords let themselves go. Since Anjou and Maine are by the 'articles' handed over to Reignier, the whole of Normandy has been as good as lost at one blow. Warwick bursts out (I. i. 114) :

Anjou and Maine ! myself did win them both ;  
Those provinces these arms of mine did conquer ;  
And are the cities that I got with wounds  
Deliver'd up again with peaceful words ?

After some exchanges, first Gloucester, then Cardinal Beaufort, finally Buckingham and Somerset, leave the hall, and Salisbury, Warwick and York are left behind. Although when we read the plays we may (as perhaps Shakespeare himself did) think that this Warwick was the same as the future King-Maker, historically it was otherwise. After the death of Salisbury in France (Part I, I. iv), his son-in-law, Richard Neville, became the Earl. His son, another Richard Neville, married the daughter of the Earl of Warwick (Richard de Beauchamp) who had died in France in 1439. As a result of both father and son marrying the heiresses of Salisbury and Warwick respectively, the second Richard Neville, born in 1428, became an enormously rich and influential nobleman. This was the 'King-Maker' of 2 and 3 *Henry VI*. One of his daughters was to marry Henry VI's son, Edward, and later, Richard Crookback. Another daughter married Richard's elder brother, Clarence. Thus Warwick had a stake in the fortunes of both the Houses of York and Lancaster. For all practical purposes, then, the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick in 2 *Henry VI* could almost be treated as one person. The alliance is between York and Warwick, while Salisbury is more of a choral figure that makes the apt comment on the developing situation (I. i. 175) :

Pride went before, ambition follows him.  
While these do labour for their own preferment,  
Behoves it us to labour for the realm.  
I never saw but Humphrey Duke of Gloucester  
Did bear him like a noble gentleman.



He proposes that his son, Warwick, himself, and York should join together and do what they can

to bridle and suppress  
The pride of Suffolk and the Cardinal,  
With Somerset's and Buckingham's ambition;  
And, as we may, cherish Duke Humphrey's deeds  
Whiles they do tend the profit of the land.

When they leave too, and York is left alone, he unburdens his mind to himself, and it is clear he is interested not in the realm but in himself (I. i. 234) :

A day will come when York shall claim his own ...  
Then will I raise aloft the milk-white rose,  
With whose sweet smell the air shall be perfum'd,  
And in my standard bear the arms of York,  
To grapple with the house of Lancaster.

The 'exposition' in I. i is a masterly piece of dramatic handiwork. It is clear Suffolk, Beaufort, Margaret, not to mention Somerset and Buckingham (Woodstock's grandson), are definitely ranged against the 'good' Duke Humphrey of Gloucester. Salisbury and Warwick are apparently neutral, and profess that they will act only for the profit of the realm. York will carve out his own destiny with diligence and cunning. Henry is well-meaning but impotent. (He is like the eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhishtira, in the *Mahabharata*). While thus the opposition to the 'good' Duke is rapidly making new converts, he receives an unexpected blow from his scheming and ambitious wife, Eleanor, who takes to magical practices to realise her foolish dreams, thereby playing into the hands of her husband's enemies. In I. iii, Suffolk and Margaret make their own plans for eliminating their enemies one by one till total power should fall like a plum into their outstretched hands. A tense scene develops in the course of which Eleanor is insulted by Margaret, and Gloucester is made painfully aware of the volume of opposition against his Protectorship of the realm. In I. iv, Eleanor is surprised in magical practices, and taken away by York and Buckingham. Thus Gloucester receives the first blow from his own wife, and this is the beginning of his end. Eleanor is tried (II. ii) and condemned to penance and banishment, and Gloucester is asked by Henry to give up his staff of office. This is Gloucester's

moment of double disgrace, but he bears himself with poise and dignity still. In the meantime, York, Salisbury and Warwick meet in the Duke of York's Garden, and from the position of vantage already gained in the Temple Garden scene in *1 Henry VI* a further decisive step is taken here. There it was a question of conceding York's claim to the Dukedom; here both Salisbury and Warwick concede York's claim to the throne, and they are the first two to salute "our rightful sovereign". But York counsels circumspection, lest any hasty move should ruin everything (II. ii. 69) :

Do as I do in these dangerous days :  
Wink at the Duke of Suffolk's insolence,  
At Beaufort's pride, at Somerset's ambition,  
At Buckingham, and all the crew of them,  
Till they have snar'd the shepherd of the flock,  
That virtuous prince, the good Duke Humphrey ;  
'Tis that they seek ; and they, in seeking that,  
Shall find their deaths, if York can prophecy.

In III. i, Gloucester is charged with all kinds of misdemeanours, and although Henry comes out on his side and Gloucester himself makes a gallant defence of his actions, he is sent guarded to Beaufort's place as a prisoner. Henry's opinion has a categorical finality (III. i. 69) :

Our kinsman Gloucester is as innocent  
From meaning treason to our royal person  
As is the sucking lamb or harmless dove  
The Duke is virtuous, mild, and too well given  
To dream on evil or to work my downfall.

To Gloucester's face also Henry says : " My conscience tells me you are innocent " ; and Gloucester is rewarded enough, and so he says, a little sadly but also forthrightly (III. i. 142) :

Ah, gracious lord, these days are dangerous !  
Virtue is chok'd by foul ambition,  
And charity chas'd hence by rancour's hand ;  
Foul subornation is predominant,  
And equity exil'd your Highness' land.  
I know their complot is to have my life . . .  
But mine is made the prologue to their play ;  
For thousands more that yet suspect no peril  
Will not conclude their plotted tragedy.

He mentions the conspirators one by one, Beaufort, Suffolk, Buckingham, "dogged York, that reaches at the moon", and Margaret herself, and he knows too that false witnesses will not be wanting "nor store of treasons to augment my guilt". When he is being taken away, he says more in sorrow than in anger :

Ah, thus King Henry throws away his crutch  
Before his legs be firm to bear his body !  
This is the shepherd beaten from thy side.  
And wolves are gnarling who shall gnaw thee first ...

After another speech from Henry breathing impotent sympathy for his uncle, the conspirators are left to themselves, and they decide that, without waiting for the farce of a trial, Gloucester should be liquidated. There is a fiendish alertness in their concurrence to accomplish this too too unholy act of political murder. Cardinal Beaufort says that he is ready to provide the executioner, the other three (Suffolk, Margaret and York) gleefully ejaculate (III. i. 278) :

Here is my hand the deed is worthy doing.  
And so say I.  
And I.

Now news comes of trouble in Ireland, and the other three (Suffolk, Beaufort, Margaret) persuade York to take an army and retrieve the situation. This too admirably suits York, and he presently unbares his bosom and unloosens the knot of vile thoughts he has long nourished in his ambitious mind (III. i. 331) :

Now, York, or never, steel thy fearful thoughts  
And change misdoubt to resolution ;  
Be that thou hop'st to be ...  
Faster than spring-time show'rs comes thought on thought,  
And not a thought but thinks on dignity.  
My brain, more busy than the labouring spider.  
Weaves tedious snares to trap mine enemies ...

In *1 Henry VI* (II. iv. 127) Warwick spoke of the possibility of the conflict of the Roses sending "a thousand souls to death". York now goes further :

Whiles I in Ireland nourish a mighty band,  
I will stir up in England some black storm  
Shall blow ten thousand souls to heaven or hell.

He has already put up John Cade to start a popular insurrection, and he will intervene at the appropriate time. York concludes with an Euclidean 'Q.E.D.':

For Humphrey being dead, as he shall be,  
And Henry put apart, the next for me.

If I. i is a remarkable dramatic exercise in 'Exposition', III. i and III. ii are no less remarkable for presenting the dramatic crisis and the quick reversal. Gloucester's noble defence outlines succinctly the Morality pattern of the developing tragedy. Virtue, being on trial, is being choked by ambition, rancour and subornation; charity and equity are unable to beat off the murderers. Henry of course has been unable to intervene on Gloucester's behalf, for 'goodness' like Henry's is really good for nothing. As Father Martindale says, "the greatest mystery of all is not Evil as such: it is the terrible inadequacy of the Good".<sup>3</sup> How about Salisbury and Warwick? They had intended to cherish good Duke Humphrey's deeds, and yet in III. i they have merely been passive. As soon as their back is turned, York actively joins the conspiracy to do away with Gloucester, and when he is all alone he outlines his own conspiracy to "put apart" Henry himself and make a bid for the throne. In III. ii, Suffolk informs the King that Gloucester is dead. Henry swoons, and when he revives sees a murderer in Suffolk. There is a spontaneous popular uprising, and Warwick and Salisbury become the spokesmen of the commons. Warwick says, obviously moved (III. ii. 153):

As surely as my soul intends to live  
With that dread King that took our state upon Him  
To free us from his Father's wrathful curse,  
I do believe that violent hands were laid  
Upon the life of this thrice-famed Duke

Is he merely playing a part? Has York gone further than Salisbury and Warwick had authorised him to go? If so, do they ever become aware of York's perfidy? Must we content ourselves with the view, expressed by M. M. Reesc, that Salisbury and York too, "in their honest, blundering way, are struck with the general blindness"?<sup>4</sup> Or shall we call them, for the moment,

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by R. W. Chambers, *Man's Unconquerable Mind*, p. 258.

<sup>4</sup> *The Cease of Majesty*, p. 186.

representative Peers and spokesmen of the people who are all profoundly agitated by the brutal murder of a good man they have learnt to love and respect?<sup>5</sup>

Be that as it may, retribution follows with lightning swiftness. Suffolk is banished notwithstanding the Queen's tactless entreaties on his behalf, and being captured by a warship off the coast of Kent is put to death after a ritualistic speech by the Lieutenant cataloguing the crimes of de la Pole, the Poole, —

Ay, kennel, puddle, sink, whose filth and dirt  
Troubles the silver spring where England drinks.

Beaufort too is suddenly overtaken by a grievous sickness, and he dies "blaspheming God, and cursing men on earth" (III. ii. 372). Nemesis has thus overtaken two of the plotters of Gloucester's death. Only Margaret and York remain, and in V. i they too will find themselves violently ranged against each other.

Most of the 10 scenes in Act IV are devoted to Cade's 'popular' rebellion, which is the prelude to the 'legitimist' York's rebellion that follows. In fact, it is York himself that has engineered Cade's rebellion to serve as a fitting background for his own more effective bid for power at a later stage. Cade too is an unforgettable creation: doesn't he anticipate leaders of 'popular' movements like Tien Wang ('the Celestial King') in China, the 'Mahdi' in the Sudan, — or, for that matter, Hitler himself? From Cade's *Mein Kampf* could be culled gems as follows (IV. ii. 69):

. . . there shall be no money; all shall eat and drink on my score, and I will apparel them all in one livery, that they may agree like brothers, and worship me their lord.

There is of course a method in this politics of frenzy, for "then are we in order when we are most out of order". The rebels hate scholars, lawyers, courtiers, gentlemen, and plan to "burn all the records of the realm"; and Cade's mouth "shall be the Parliament of England. . . . And henceforward all things shall be in common". The indictment against Lord Say is that he "most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar school" (IV. vii. 30). The conspiracy to kill Glou-

<sup>5</sup> See Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 183.

cester, the retribution that overtakes Suffolk and Beaufort, and the mob frenzy unleashed by Cade follow a pattern that is repeated in the maturer political play, *Julius Caesar*. Shakespeare doesn't judge; Cade is a mad fellow, but so is Beaufort; so are Suffolk, Margaret and York. Mad — or maddened — or victims of madness; such seem to be the three major categories of humanity in the world of *Henry VI*. And poor Cade dies fighting Alexander Iden, but mainly regretting the ten meals he has lost during the five days he has been in hiding. His followers have already surrendered to Buckingham and Clifford, and are pardoned by the King.

York's rebellion is not so easily to be disposed of. The compromise attempted by Buckingham fails when the Queen refuses to honour its terms. York, Salisbury, Warwick and their retainers openly defy Henry and his supporters — notably the Cliffords. The first battle in the 'Wars of the Roses' is fought at St. Albans, and Henry's party are routed. The Yorkists propose to pursue the King to London and canvass for Parliament's support. Somerset and Old Clifford are slain, and Young Clifford takes the solemn oath (V. ii. 56):

Henceforth I will not have to do with pity:  
Meet I an infant of the house of York,  
Into as many gobbets will I cut it  
As wild Medea young Absyrtus did;  
In cruelty will I seek out my name.

Evidently, there is not much to choose between a Cade that is power-drunk and a Clifford that is blood-crazy. Of the four that decreed the 'good' Humphrey's death, two have gone the way of all flesh, and the other two — York and Margaret — are eager to tear each other out. Each unto himself (or herself) alone, and the devil for them all!

While the total impact of 2 *Henry VI* is that of a 'thriller', there are moments in it that seem to look forward to some of the great scenes in the later plays. The filiations with *Julius Caesar* apart, doesn't Beaufort's death-bed raving (III. ii. 9) anticipate in some measure Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking:

Died he not in his bed? Where should he die?  
Can I make men live, whe'er they will or no?  
O, torture me no more! I will confess.

Alive again? Then show me where he is;  
 I'll give a thousand pound to look upon him.  
 He hath no eyes, the dust hath blinded them.  
 Comb down his hair; look, look! it stands upright,  
 like lime-twigs set to catch my winged soul!  
 Give me some drink; and bid the apothecary  
 Bring the strong poison that I bought of him.

When Henry presently appeals to the Eternal Mover —

O, beat away the busy meddling fiend  
 That lays strong siege unto this wretch'd soul,  
 And from his bosom purge this black despair! —

it might be the Ghost in *Hamlet* asking the Prince to "step between her (Gertrude) and her fighting soul" (III. iv. 113).

### III

#### 3 HENRY VI

The conclusion of 2 *Henry VI* is also the commencement of 3 *Henry VI*, for York and Lancaster's "long jars" continue without intermission. If anything, the tempo rises still further, and a new ferocity is introduced in the person of York's youngest son Richard (later the Duke of Gloucester, the 'Bad' Duke, in contrast to the 'Good' Duke Humphrey), better known as the Crookback. In 2 *Henry VI* (V. ii. 70), after Somerset's fall, Richard had said:

Sword, hold thy temper; heart, be wrathful still:  
 Priests pray for enemies, but princes kill.

This is typical of the man; he can kill with a laugh, with a snigger, or with a theological pun. And, on the other side, there is Margaret and her devoted knight, Young Clifford, with his determination to prove another Medea. In the *Mahabharata*, we see how, as the days pass, both sides — the Pandavas no less than the Kauravas — ignore the imperatives of *dharma* (righteousness); as the 18-day war proceeds, *dharma* recedes more and more. So it is with the Wars of the Roses as Shakespeare presents their destructive frenzy in 2 and 3 *Henry VI* and *Richard III*.

3 *Henry VI* opens with the Yorkists, who have pursued the King from St. Albans to London, assembling at Parliament House. There is in Warwick now more of the aggressive Northumberland of *Richard II* than of the well-meaning upright young nobleman who expressed horror at the murder of the 'Good' Duke Humphrey. It is indeed Warwick who asks York to occupy the vacant throne, and, when almost immediately afterwards the Lancastrians enter with the King at their head, hot verbal exchanges take place, and Henry's title to the throne is questioned and defended. Suddenly Warwick shows the mailed fist (I. i. 166):

Do right unto this princely Duke of York :  
Or I will fill the house with armed men.  
And over the chair of state, where now he sits,  
Write up his title with usurping blood.

Henry loses his nerve — "base, fearful, and despairing Henry", as Westmoreland calls him — pleads that he might be allowed to reign as King during his own life-time, and agrees to entail the crown to York and his heirs for ever. The Yorkists disperse in jubilation, but Margaret, and her son Edward Prince of Wales, take Henry to task for so brazenly bartering *their* rights away. Likewise, York's sons — Edward and Richard — are also restive, and would rather fight it out with the Lancastrians immediately. Richard pleads with his father (I. ii. 28):

And, father, do but think  
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown.  
Within whose circuit is Elysium  
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.  
Why do we linger thus? I cannot rest  
Until the white rose that I wear be dy'd  
Even in the lukewarm blood of Henry's heart.

Thus 'fire-eaters' on both sides take charge of the events, and so there is no chance for poor, lukewarm, or any sort of peace or respite. At the ensuing engagement at Wakefield, Young Clifford kills the innocent Rutland (York's son), notwithstanding his pathetic plea: "I never did thee harm; why wilt thou slay me?" (I. ii. 38). Clifford's answer is:

No cause!  
Thy father slew my father: therefore, die.



York himself is overtaken, and is at the mercy of the Lancastrians. But in their brief hour of success, except for Northumberland, they are just as meanly cruel and bloodthirsty as the Yorkists. Margaret and Clifford stab York, but not before hurling taunts at him and showing him a handkerchief stained with Rutland's blood. York aptly describes Margaret as "she-wolf of France . . . tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide", and his dying curse (I. iv. 35) —

These tears are my sweet Rutland's obsequies;  
And every drop cries vengeance for his death  
'Gainst thee, fell Clifford, and thee, false Frenchwoman! —

echoes ominously in the air. More battles are fought — the 2nd Battle of St. Albans, which Margaret wins and Warwick loses, and the Battle of Townton, in which the Lancastrians are routed, Clifford is slain, and the Yorkists are on top again. This brings us to the year 1461.

The futility, ferocity and sheer inhumanity of 'war' (and especially 'civil war') is vividly brought out in II. v, in which the pathetic Henry sitting on a mole-hill watches the juxtaposition of a Son who has killed his Father and a Father who has killed his Son. If only he could be a shepherd (that was Prince Arthur's wish, too, in *King John*), a homely swain carving out dials quaintly, observing how the minutes run (II. v. 41):

Ah, what a life were this! how sweet! how lovely!  
Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade  
To shepherds looking on their silly sheep,  
Than doth a rich embroider'd canopy  
To kings that fear their subjects' treachery?

Although the victory of the Yorkist faction means the enthronement of Edward IV (York's eldest son), the swelling legacy of the ancestral crimes cannot but breed multiplying evil. In the Second Book of *Paradise Lost*, Milton gives a terribly revolting picture of Sin and Death and their numerous progeny:

These yelling monsters, that with ceaseless cry  
Surround me, as thou saw'st — hourly conceived  
And hourly born, with sorrow infinite  
To me . . .

So it has been with the numerous progeny of Edward III. Evil starts, evil accomplishes atrocious inbreeding, evil continually destroys the agents it feeds by making them victims at the same time. While the all-powerful Warwick — the "setter-up and plucker-down of kingdoms" — is away in France to negotiate a suitable match for Edward IV, the King decides to make the widow, Elizabeth Woodville (Lady Grey), his Queen, since she will not consent to be his concubine. This action throws Warwick into the arms of Queen Margaret and the Lancastrians, and he resolves to re-seat Henry VI on the throne. Meantime Richard — "that valiant crookback prodigy", in Queen Margaret's utterly adequate words — has his own hopes, plans and fears (III. iii. 128):

And yet, between my soul's desire and me --  
 The lustful Edward's title buried --  
 Is Clarence, Henry, and his son young Edward,  
 And all the unlook'd for issue of their bodies,  
 To take their rooms ere I can place myself.  
 A cold premeditation for my purpose!  
 Why, then I do but dream on sovereignty;  
 Like one that stands upon a promontory  
 And spies a far-off shore where he would tread,  
 Wishing his foot were equal with his eye . . .  
 Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile . . .  
 I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,  
 Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,  
 And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.  
 I can add colours to the chameleon,  
 Change shapes with Protheus for advantages,  
 And set the murderous Machiavel to school.  
 Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?  
 Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down.

In this chronicle of oath against oath, perjury against perjury, deceit against deceit, Richard suddenly emerges as a somewhat exceptional figure. We are in the presence of no ordinary criminal, no mere avenger seeking any particular victim, no limited ambition setting a boundary to its machinations, but Evil itself in a seemingly human form, Evil that gaily scatters the seeds of sin and gathers whole harvests of crime. *He* doesn't sin absent-mindedly; he is no reluctant sinner either; he revels and laves in sin, he is almost religiously wedded to sin. More

even than his actions, it is his liveliness and virtuosity that fascinate and terrify us — like a cobra rhythmically swinging its upraised hood. He is an advance on Aaron; but not even Iago can render him stale.

While Richard is biding his time, Warwick raises the standard of rebellion, the Yorkists lose, and Henry changes the Tower for the Palace. But not for long; for Edward and Richard gather their scattered powers together, and at the Battle of Barnet (1471), the Lancastrians lose again, and Warwick dies — as Hotspur does in *1 Henry IV* — speaking eloquent words expressing belated wisdom. Thus Hotspur (*1 Henry IV*, V. iv. 81) :

But thoughts, the slaves of life, and life, time's fool,  
And time, that takes survey of all the world,  
Must have a stop . . . No, Percy, thou art dust  
And food for —

"For worms", adds Hal. And Warwick's words are (V. ii. 23) :

Lo now my glory smear'd in dust and blood!  
My parks, my walks, my manors, that I had,  
Even now forsake me; and of all my lands  
Is nothing left but my body's length.  
Why, what is pomp, rule, reign, but earth and dust?  
And live we how we can, yet die we must.

The surviving Lancastrians join Queen Margaret and her army from France, and engage the Yorkists at Tewksbury, and are once again overpowered. Prince Edward is brutally done to death by Edward and his 2 brothers, and Richard (now Duke of Gloucester) promptly proceeds to London and kills Henry VI as well. The hapless old King knows that his end is near and his tongue turns to prophecy (V. vi. 37) that "many a thousand . . . shall rue the hour that ever thou wast born". Even when Richard stabs him, Henry dies with the words: "O, God forgive my sins and pardon thee!" With a grim irony, Shakespeare has brought together the wickedest of the Yorkists and the purest of the Lancastrians. Richard, of course, doesn't understand Henry, and cannot cultivate love, brotherhood, loyalty, which are mere words to him (V. vi. 80) :

I have no brother, I am like no brother;  
And this word 'love', which greybeards call divine,

Be resident in men like one another,  
And not in me ! I am myself alone.

Is it self-laudation or self-condemnation ? In V. vii, Edward IV hopes that now at long last there can be stately triumphs and mirthful comic shows inaugurating their "lasting joy" ; but we know that, with Gloucester hovering in the background, it is only one irony more coming on top of so many others.

## IV

## RICHARD III

From the conflict with France in *1 Henry VI*, the struggle narrowed down to the unseemly intense strife between the descendants (Duke Humphrey and Cardinal Beaufort) of old John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in *2 Henry VI* ; and, after Humphrey's death, the struggle widened towards the end of the play to the first Battle of the Roses at St. Albans. In *3 Henry VI*, the Wars of the Roses continued, till almost all the petals of the Red Rose of Lancaster were shed and trampled upon, and the White Rose (although damaged a good deal) came to a late bloom. In *Richard III*, the struggle is between the children of the Duke of York, a narrower and intenser struggle than that between Gaunt's grandson and (illegitimate) son in *1 & 2 Henry VI*, and this intestine struggle is pursued till almost all the White Rose petals are also trampled in the dust. The Duchess of York, who didn't figure in *Henry VI*, now appears for the first time, and thus succinctly sums up her sorrows and her apprehensions (II. iv. 55) :

Accursed and unquiet wrangling days,  
How many of you have mine eyes beheld !  
My husband lost his life to get the crown ;  
And often up and down my sons were toss'd  
For me to joy and weep their gain and loss ;  
And being seated, and domestic broils  
Clean overblown, themselves the conquerors  
Make war upon themselves—brother to brother,  
Blood to blood, self against self.

Shakespeare was evidently both repelled and fascinated by this Medusa-monstrosity, this "bunch-backed toad", this crook-back Machiavel, whom even her mother feels constrained to condemn (IV. iv. 166) :

Thou cam'st on-earth to make the earth my hell.  
 A grievous burden was thy birth to me ;  
 Tetchy and wayward was thy infancy ;  
 Thy schooldays frightful, desprate, wild and furious ;  
 The prime of manhood daring, bold, and venturous ;  
 Thy age confirm'd, proud, subtle, sly, and bloody.  
 More mild, but yet more harmful-kind in hatred.

Here's a miniature biography of Richard by his own mother, and we are meant to accept it as strictly factual and objective. Such a phenomenon cannot be normal, for evil is not normal, and a colossus of evil like Richard can only be a gross perversion of nature. To describe him aright, people are obliged to compare this seeming ugly man with animals and insects : tiger, hog, toad, spider, cockatrice ; but the words oftenest used are 'toad' (which is *both* ugly and venomous) and 'devil' (whose propensity to evil is infinite). He gloats over evil as never Satan himself did, for presumably even Satan remembers heaven now and then and is therefore seized with remorse, or at least self-pity. But Richard is wholly without regrets, as he is without any compunctious visitings whatsoever. He is no doubt a superlatively gifted hypocrite, who could frame his face "to all occasions" ; and he is able to gain the confidence of the very people whom he wants to destroy. He is master of all the arts of simulation and dissimulation, and, of course, he is an artist in crime. He is a superb actor, too, and this really is the final secret of his 'success'. He *seems* to act the part of a comedian, and also to enjoy the part, and thus even when he is most a hypocrite and a villain, his potential victims are so much lost in admiration of the sheer virtuosity of his 'acting' that they don't take him seriously enough — till it is too late.

For purposes of concentration and speed, Shakespeare has resorted in *Richard III* to dramatic telescoping and has freely drawn upon his imagination to emphasise character-contrasts, and the working of nemesis. The same Henry VI who had hard and bitter words for Richard also found words of auspicious

import for young Henry, Earl of Richmond (*3 Henry VI*, IV. vi. 67) :

Come hither, England's hope. If secret powers  
Suggest but truth to my divining thoughts,  
This pretty lad will prove our country's bliss.  
His looks are full of peaceful majesty ;  
His head by nature fram'd to wear a crown,  
His hand to wield a sceptre ; and himself  
Likely in time to bless a regal throne.

The curse of England, Richard ; England's hope, Richmond : such is the polarisation of forces in the play. All the accumulated evil of the past has taken shape as this boil in the body politic, and it must burst now, and all the venom must be spent ; it will then signify the return of health, and the roses of spring, and the promise of joy. But although the plotting of the play is built on this polarisation of forces and the interlocked system of nemesis, Richard himself manages to dominate the scene from first to last. As if to emphasise this, I. i begins with his 40-line soliloquy, an advance upon even his own soliloquies in *3 Henry VI* (III. ii. 124 and V. vi. 61), in which we are permitted to see the wires, the very machinery, of his diabolic intelligence functioning with precision and ease. He is not framed by nature to be a lover ; therefore he will prove a villain. He has already arranged things in such a way that King Edward must suspect Clarence, their brother, and order his execution. But when Clarence is being led to the Tower, Richard by sleight of hand shifts the blame to Edward's wife, Elizabeth, and promises to intercede with the King on his behalf. Yet the moment his back is turned Richard relapses to the soliloquy-style of wearing his heart upon his sleeve (I. i. 117) :

Go tread the path that thou shalt ne'er return.  
Simple, plain Clarence, I do love thee so  
That I will shortly send thy soul to heaven . . .

"You know my methods?" Richard seems to tell us, and he has given us a neat sample of the way his methods work. The machine works faster and tidier in the succeeding scenes till suddenly—unaccountably—it begins to creak, and there is a crash ; and there an end.

3 *Henry VI* closes with the murder of the saintly King in the Tower. In I.ii of *Richard III*; the coffin of the late King Henry VI — attended by Lady Anne (Warwick's daughter and Prince Edward's widow) as chief mourner — is shown as being conveyed in melancholy procession to the appointed grave. Richard chooses this moment to woo the Lady Anne, and — amazing man! — he actually gets her to say 'yes' to his monstrous proposal. In IV.i, Anne explains to Queen Elizabeth how this had happened:

When scarce the blood was well wash'd from his hands  
Which issued from my other angel husband,  
And that dear saint which then I weeping follow'd —  
O, when, I say, I look'd on Richard's face,  
This was my wish: 'Be thou' quoth I 'accurs'd,  
For making me, so young, so old a widow;  
And when thou wold'st, let sorrow haunt thy bed ...'  
Lo, ere I can repeat this curse again,  
Within so small a time, my woman's heart  
Grossly grew captive to his honey words  
And prov'd the subject of mine own soul's curse ...

One by one, Richard has already removed many of the impediments between him and the throne, but now he makes his moves with an infernal precision. Although the play is supposed to cover the events of 14 years (1471-85), we have the feeling that Time is fleet-footed; events move fast, and this precipitancy is meant to overpower us. Historically, Edward IV died on 9 April 1483, but in *Richard III* we reach this event in II.ii; the rest of Act II and the last 3 Acts are devoted to the period from April 1483 to 22 August 1485. Hastings was executed on 13 June 1483, Rivers, Vaughan and Grey following two days later. The crown was offered to Richard on 25 June and he became King the next day. Buckingham's execution took place in October 1483. After a period of comparative outward quiet, things began to move again early in 1485. Queen Anne died (or was murdered) in March 1585; Richmond landed on 7 August, and the Battle of Bosworth was fought on 22 August. The developments during 1483-5 were swift enough by normal standards, but Shakespeare makes it appear that the pace of change was even more startling and ominous, and what makes it at all plausible is the diabolic power and personality of Richard.

Besides Richard, there is also another power in the play that operates with steady remorseless efficiency. Anne curses Richard even when she agrees at last to marry him ; but none can curse as well as — or has more cause to curse than — Queen Margaret. A survival from *I Henry VI*, she is an ageless creature ("foul wrinkled witch", Richard calls her), and she can curse (and teach others to curse) ; and this 'cursing' is no mere expression of anger or spite but acquires rather the accents of unalterable Doom. In I.iii, Margaret surprises her enemies ("you wrangling pirates", she calls them) and mouths out her quick blood-curdling curses :

Though not by war, by surfeit die your king.  
As ours by murder, to make him a king !  
Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales,  
For Edward our son, that was Prince of Wales,  
Die in his youth by like untimely violence !  
Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,  
Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self. . .  
And, after many length'ned hours of grief,  
Die neither mother, wife, nor England's Queen !  
Rivers and Dorset, you were standers by,  
And so wast thou, Lord Hastings, when my son  
Was stabb'd with bloody daggers. God, I pray him,  
That none of you may live his natural age . . .

Then, turning last to Richard, —

If heaven have any grievous plague in store  
Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee.  
O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,  
And then hurl down their indignation  
On thee, the troubler of the poor world's peace !  
The worm of conscience still be-gnaw thy soul !  
Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou liv'st,  
And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends !  
No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,  
Unless it be while some tormenting dream  
Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils !

The rest of the play is merely the fulfilment of Margaret's 'curses' one by one. It is as though the 'action' of the play is the predictable curve whose coordinates are provided, on the one part, by Richard's scheming brain, and, on the other, by the cursing power of Margaret (and, to a lesser extent, of the other



bereaved women of the play). The death of Clarence in Act I is followed by the death of Edward IV in Act II; in Act III, the Princes are sent to the Tower, Hastings is executed, and Richard becomes King. The turn in the tide begins at last, and Richard's schemes, if they are now bolder than ever, are also a little absurd. The Princes are murdered in the Tower, and when the three widows (Margaret, the Duchess of York, and Queen Elizabeth) raise a united wail in IV. iv, it is as though Mother Earth's heaped-up woes are achieving an orchestrated torment of fierce self-expression. Then follows Buckingham's death, — and Bosworth, — and the fulfilment of the last of Margaret's curses as well.

When Edward IV dies of "Surfeit", Richard makes his moves with precision and finesse. He knows still how to make others do his own dirty jobs, and yet make them feel that it is Richard that is the junior partner. For example, he tells Buckingham (II. ii. 151) :

My other self, my counsel's consistory,  
My oracle, my prophet, my dear cousin,  
I, as a child, will go by thy direction.

The Princes are first separated from their mother's "proud kindred", and in III. iii we see them (Rivers, Grey and Vaughan) being taken away for their execution. Grey remembers Margaret's curse, and remembers the curse on Buckingham and Hastings. It is, sure enough, Hastings's turn next. In *Henry V*, the King gets Cambridge, Scroop and Grey to condemn themselves (II. ii) unwittingly; likewise, Richard gets Hastings to condemn himself when he says (III. iv. 65) :

The tender love I bear your Grace, my lord,  
Makes me most forward in this princely presence  
To doom th' offenders, whosoe'er they be.  
I say, my lord, they have deserved death...  
If they have done this deed, my noble lord.

Promptly Richard barks out :

Talk'st thou to me of ifs? Thou art a traitor.  
Off with his head! Now by Saint Paul I swear  
I will not dine until I see the same.

It is Hastings's cue now to remember Margaret's curse :

O Margaret, Margaret, now thy heavy curse  
Is lighted on poor Hastings' wretched head !

Notwithstanding the fate of Hastings, Buckingham continues sincerely to advance Richard's interests. As he appears aloft between two Bishops, Buckingham comments for the edification of the Mayor, Aldermen and the citizens (III. vii. 96) :

Two props of virtue for a Christian prince,  
To stay him from the fall of vanity ;  
And, see, a book of prayer in his hand,  
Two ornaments to know a holy man.

He is at last persuaded to accept the cares of kingship,

penetrable to your kind entreaties,  
Albeit against my conscience and my soul

But even Richard doesn't know when to stop. It is not enough to be King ; all other possible claimants must be made 'sure' one way or another. The Princes are to be murdered in the tower, Clarence's daughter is to be married to "some mean poor gentleman" (Clarence's son, being foolish, could be ignored), and — a brain-wave ? — he, Richard, must marry Edward's daughter, having first got rid of Anne his present wife. Too many plans, too many defensive burrows, betoken not a steady but a wavering uncertain mind, and such is Richard's plight now (IV. ii. 64) :

I must be married to my brother's daughter,  
Or else my kingdom stands on brittle glass  
Murder her brothers, and then marry her !  
Uncertain way of gain ! But I am in  
So far in blood that sin will pluck on sin

In the extraordinary scene (IV. iii) in which the three Widows meet and mingle their lamentations and curses, the basic theme is that always it is the woman who pays the heaviest toll by way of suffering. In the *Mahabharata* too, when all the fighting is over and done, Gandhari who has lost *all* her 100 sons, Kunti who has lost her son Karna, and Draupadi who has lost her son Abhimanyu, all wail together and try to console one another.

Historically impossible, this scene in *Richard III* is central to the scheme of the entire tetralogy. As the mutual curses and recriminations fill the air, we view, in R. G. Moulton's words, "a vista of nemeses receding further and further back into history".<sup>6</sup> Richard chooses this particular moment (or is it the moment that chooses him?) to beg his sister-in-law, Elizabeth, to give him her daughter in marriage. When a man repeats the same trick, it is a sign he is growing stale. Even otherwise it is clear that he has not (V. iii. 73) "that alacrity of spirit/Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have". While he thinks he has won, she is merely gaining time; she sends word to Henry Earl of Richmond (the grandson of the Earl of Somerset who figured in the Temple Garden scene in *1 Henry VI*) that she is agreeable to his marrying her daughter. Richard's villainy has lost its old seeming infallibility. It is the beginning of the end.

Nemesis will now play its last card of all. The fall of Clarence had been brought about by Elizabeth and her faction; Hastings had helped to get rid of the Queen's kindred; Buckingham had approved of the execution of Hastings; next Buckingham himself is led to execution, and he too (like the others) recalls Margaret's curse (V. i. 25). Now it is finally Richard's own; he has been in all the villainies, he has always swung the wheel of Nemesis to his own advantage so far, but even he cannot escape the reckoning for ever. On the eve of the Battle of Bosworth, the ghosts of his victims appear to curse him (and to wish god-speed to Richmond). Richard, waking up, realises how (as Margaret had cursed him) conscience has begun be-gnawing his soul (V. iii. 193):

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,  
And every tongue brings in a several tale,  
And every tale condemns me for a villain . . .  
Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd  
Came to my tent, and every one did threat  
Tomorrow's vengeance on the head of Richard.

Richard and Richmond meet at Bosworth field, and although his ranks are thinned by the swarms of deserters to Richmond, Richard dies, not whining, but fighting — his last ringing words

<sup>6</sup> *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (1901), p. 113; also p. 110.

being "A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!" (V. iv. 7). Descended on his mother's side from John of Gaunt, Henry marries Elizabeth, Edward IV's daughter; and so the Red and the White Roses are united at last.

In the 'Festival of Britain' year (1951) the Lancastrian tetralogy was presented in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon with marked success; and more recently, in 1963, it was the turn of the Yorkist tetralogy — though it was now recast into a trilogy, 'The Wars of the Roses'. *I Henry VI* became simply *Henry VI*, 2 & 3 *Henry VI* (considerably abridged) became *Edward IV*, while *Richard III* largely retained its identity. For adapting and editing the versions for this production, John Barton took more liberties with the originals than is usual, the ostensible aim being "to reduce their length and try and sharpen their meaning". For example, the six lines from Warwick's dying speech quoted on an earlier page become only three in Barton's version. Apart from omissions and compressions, some 'bridge passages and interpolations' too have been added. The trouble with this itch for 'improving' Shakespeare is that, once one yields to it, there may be no limit to the 'monkeying' with the original. If a modern audience can stand three plays in succession, it can stand four no less; and, ultimately, it is not the 'improver' that makes the plays still viable on the stage but rather the dramatic genius of Shakespeare — even Shakespeare in his 'nonage'.

## V

### 'A GENERAL GROAN'

The sequence of the eight plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III* is, on a total view, an impressive political pageant, an epic in its moving multiplicity of incident and character, a story heroic as well as human in its painstaking veracity and utter universality. — verily, an English *Mahabharata*, the recordation of "a general groan". Of the two Richards, John Palmer justly writes: "The man who is self-centred in imagination and the man who is self-centred in action are equally out of tune with reality, and equally doomed to destruction".<sup>7</sup> Like the two Richards, the two

<sup>7</sup> *Political Characters in Shakespeare* (1948), p. 179.

Gloucesters too — the Good Duke Humphrey and the Bad Duke Richard — offer a study in contrast ; Humphrey is his nephew's 'crutch', but Richard is his nephews' bane. We might also cast our eyes back and have a look at a third Gloucester, the hero of *Woodstock*, whose murder at Calais sparks off the chain-reactions that are the theme of the two tetralogies. There are the three Henrys too : the Fourth who seizes England for himself and his heirs, the Fifth who wins France at Agincourt, and the Sixth who loses both France and England. The permanent results of Agincourt were nil ; what chance or force of arms gave, fickle chance and the shifting fortunes of war took away. The significant life-work of Henry VI was the foundation of Eton College at Windsor and King's College at Cambridge, "nobler monuments, surely", in the words of E. H. Carter and R. A. F. Mears, "than the fading glories of Agincourt". Like the Richards and Henrys, the Yorks too — the weak but honest Edmund of Langley Duke of York of *Richard II* and his masterful but unscrupulous grandson in *Henry VI* — invite comparative study. The 2 tetralogies are peopled with power-seeking politicians, to whom nothing is sacred. Noblemen like Northumberland, Worcester, Hotspur, Scroop, Somerset, Suffolk, Warwick, Buckingham, Westmoreland, and Clifford have their own personal armies (big or small), and although they take frequently the names of God, King and Country, although they utter resounding oaths and promise eternal fealty or friendship, their ego alone is God, King and Country, — loyalty, friendship and kinship, — for them. They have little use for learning, and they almost despise piety. (There are the usual exceptions : little Rutland, when he is stabbed by Clifford, dies speaking Latin : *Di faciant laudis summa sit ista tuae!*) Romantic love but plays a minor part in their lives. Suffolk, of course, lusts after Margaret, and Edward IV after Lady Grey, but they pay for it in the end. Normally women are but dolls or mere chattel, to be played with or used, received or given away. Ambitious women like Queen Margaret or the Duchess Eleanor are as rare as Joan of Arc, and they only provoke violent antipathies. The generality of women are content to conform to the passive womanly type, symbols of silent suffering, the docile mothers and sustainers of the race in spite of the murderous propensities of the male of the species. In the audaciously conceived scene in *Richard III* where the 3 sorrowing

mothers raise a chorus of doleful recapitulation and futile re-creation, it is the blood-curdling scream of widowhood and motherhood bemoaning the slaughters of husbands and children, the general groan of the Madonnas of Suffering that echoes and re-echoes for ever.

As for the men, they range from one extreme, Henry VI, gentle, saintly, long-suffering, to the other extreme, flint-hearted, blasphemous, venomous Richard III. Most of them are just imperfect human beings, compounded of the elements of good and evil in varying proportions, but none without some redeeming quality asserting itself at some time or other. Yet they are all as a rule so intoxicated with the sense of their individual importance or of the rightness of their 'cause' that with them the wish is invariably the father to the thought. To change sides is for them as justifiable as to change shirts, and to double-cross one's friends when it is to one's advantage is as legitimate as to spite one's declared enemy. They are terribly conscious of their noble birth, and are lofty contemptuous of the common people. But did Shakespeare also share this contempt for the people? To judge from the scenes describing Jack Cade's rebellion, while Shakespeare certainly didn't romanticise the anarchic egalitarian experiment, neither did he present the common people in terms of mere contempt. "The episode", says John Palmer,

"turns out on examination to be an interlude graced with touches of humanity and humour for which we shall look in vain on the aristocratic fields of Towton or Tewksbury. It leaves us with the impression that stupidity and ruthlessness in a mob are less repulsive than stupidity and ruthlessness in high places".<sup>8</sup>

It is a common murderer that gives this vivid description of the insidious workings of conscience (*Richard III*, I. iv. 133):

I'll not meddle with it—it makes a man a coward: a man cannot steal, but it accuseth him; a man cannot swear, but it checks him; a man cannot lie with his neighbour's wife, but it detects him. 'Tis a blushing shamefac'd spirit that mutinies in a man's bosom; it fills a man full of obstacles: it made me once restore a purse of gold that—by chance I found. It beggars any man that keeps it. It is turn'd out of towns and cities for a dangerous thing; and every man that means to live well endeavours to trust to himself and live without it.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 319.

The murderer is as lively in his own way as Richard is in his special way, and though he bombasts no blank verse his prose is as lithe and vigorous as Richard's rhetoric is steely in its brilliance and power. While the commoners can argue after a fashion, the nobles seldom attempt serious argument; they make speeches instead, or they exchange (as in Tennis Singles) *stichomythia*, or they hurl the foulest execrations at one another (like Humphrey and Beaufort, for example). When all fail, the mailed fist is expected to do duty. They "sweet lord" one another promiscuously, and some of their 'asides' are unspeakably coarse or outrageously criminal. Their nearest modern counterparts are the war lords and the commissars of totalitarian countries, or the managers or bosses of political caucuses in the democracies.

One thing, however, must be said in favour of these noblemen. Fighting animals they may be, but they are not cowards. They are ready to fight even against the heaviest odds. And they are ready to die. They do not, like the modern captains of war, send the common soldiers ahead as ready cannon fodder, while hiding themselves in carefully camouflaged and heavily sand-bagged defensive positions well behind the fighting lines. Many of them die on the battle-field, many are publicly executed, and many others are secretly put to death. The victim may be overpowered in his bed, and he may exhibit a sense of surprise; he may seek information; he may indulge in self-criticism or give vent to the itch for prophecy (and most of them *do* prophesy about the woes still to come); but hardly any of them behaves abjectly or whines unworthily in the end. Writing of the Yorkist tetralogy, R. W. Chambers says: "For scope, power, patriotism, and sense of doom (it) had probably no parallel since Aeschylus wrote the trilogy of which the *Persians* is the surviving fragment".<sup>9</sup> The words may be applied with equal relevance to the entire cycle of the double tetralogy from *Richard II* to *Richard III*. What unites the cycle, says Tillyard, "is the steady political theme: the theme of order and chaos, of proper political degree and civil war, of crime and punishment, of God's mercy finally tempering his justice, of the belief that such has been God's way with England".<sup>10</sup> Crime provokes punishment, wrong calls for

<sup>9</sup> *Man's Unconquerable Mind*, p. 254.

<sup>10</sup> *Shakespeare's History Plays*, pp. 200-1.

reprisal; but human affairs are so complicated that no evil can be easily isolated. Prophecies, dreams and curses acquire a sinister power to control events. Currents of crime and revenge, more crime and more revenge, are alternately generated, and the opposing categories tend to get increasingly blurred. As the evil rages unchecked, a new malignancy seizes the actors, and iron enters the souls of even the originally well-meaning and honourable. Men of good will prove more and more incapable of controlling the events let loose by proud, ambitious or lustful men. The power of evil steadily grows from play to play in the Yorkist tetralogy till, in *Richard III*, all evil seems to gather into a head. If there is a steady advance towards an earthly ideal of kingship from Richard II to Henry V, there is likewise a steady decline towards an infernal ideal as we pass from Henry VI to Edward IV and from Edward IV to Richard III. Then, when all seems hopeless, when it looks as though the eclipse of good is apparently for ever, Henry Earl of Richmond steps in, almost like a heaven-sent messenger. "But what a stick he is", exclaims Dover Wilson, "and how conventional are his sentiments and perfunctory his verse"! <sup>11</sup> But isn't that really the whole point of the play? After the phosphorescent brilliance and virtuosity of "this guilty homicide", Richard, it is the prosaic and the conventional that comes as a soothing balm. Disease is feverish and exciting, it is health that is humdrum and conventional. And it is the prosaic Richmond's role to beat back the shadows and usher in the bright dawn of a new era of peace. Terms like crime and punishment have perhaps no meaning in a context where far too many are involved in them both. Men are mostly Abels pursued, or Cains pursuing; and not seldom are they *both* pursuers and the pursued. We think that a little concession to evil, a minor compromise with sin, will not hurt us very much; but as Richard realised at last, "sin will pluck on sin". No comfortable *entente cordiale* with sin and evil is possible. We either go the whole hog, or knuckle under on the way. We cannot both play with evil and circumscribe its operations; the Jekylls who flirt with evil become in time unalterable Hydes. As the reader closes the last of this cycle of 8 plays, weariness and exhaustion overpower him. We can hardly believe our ears when Richmond says (V. v. 40):

<sup>11</sup> Introduction to the *New Shakespeare* edition, p. xlv.



Now civil wounds are stopp'd, peace lives again—  
That she may long live here, God say amen!

It is the calm that descends on a city desolated by a cyclone or an earthquake—the dazed peace that followed the ravages of the atomic explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The tempest is a recurring image in these plays, and the differentiated imagery of clouds, thunder, lightning, rains, winds, gusts, gales, tides, storms and shipwrecks is frequently employed by characters in moments of stress and strain to indicate the close correspondence between the disturbances in the outside world and all the agonies of "the windy tempest of my heart" (3 *Henry VI*, II. v. 86).<sup>12</sup> Evil has raged so long, crimes and revenges and suffering have so long become the currency of the realm, that the very taste of peace and the flavour of human affection have been almost forgotten; and conscience, long derided and suppressed, has nearly lost its function. Charity, pity, forgiveness, meekness—order, 'degree', legitimacy, commonalty—have also suffered gross betrayal or damage. The way of egotism and pride, sin and crime, can show the way only to this winter of approximate death. But the sterility and blight have ended at last, and spring and a bright new day are possible again.

## VI

### HENRY VIII

*Henry VIII* may be described as an 'Epilogue' to the historical double tetralogy, *King John* being the 'Prologue'.

'Tis ten to one this play can never please  
All that are here—

says the Epilogue to this 'Epilogue', and certainly this is true of the critics. The Folio printed the play as the last of the *Historics*, but period-classification groups it with the *Romances*—*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. But doubt is expressed whether either its plot or its style shows

<sup>12</sup> The point is fully elaborated by G. Wilson Knight in his book, *The Shakespearian Tempest*, especially Ch. II.

the maturity of the last plays. Quiller-Couch can hardly hide his irritation with the play :

"*King Henry VIII* ... starts upon Buckingham, works his fate to a climax, drops it, starts upon Katharine, works hers to a climax, drops it, starts upon Wolsey, works his to a climax, drops it, and winds up with a merry christening".<sup>13</sup>

What the play lacks above all, according to Quiller-Couch, is "moral unity", which "ranks above the famous unities of action, time and place". What has the fate of Buckingham, Katharine and Wolsey to do with the christening of the child Elizabeth?

As for the style, we don't know whether it is a throw-back on the style of an earlier period or a variation of the final muted poetry of *The Tempest*. Here is Wolsey's elaborate exercise in self-pity (III. ii. 350) :

Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness !  
This is the state of man : today he puts forth  
The tender leaves of hopes ; tomorrow blossoms  
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him ;  
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,  
And when he thinks, good easy man, full surely  
His greatness is a-ripening, nips his root,  
And then he falls, as I do. I have ventur'd,  
Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,  
This many summers in a sea of glory ;  
But far beyond my depth. My high-blown pride  
At length broke under me, and now has left me,  
Weary and old with service, to the merey  
Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me . .

And here is Katharine's poignant verse, almost reminiscent of Hermione's in the great Trial Scene (II. iv. 70) :

I am about to weep ; but, thinking that  
We are a queen, or long have dream'd so, certain  
The daughter of a king, my drops of tears  
I'll turn to sparks of fire.

Mark van Doren makes the comment that "the two styles in *Henry VIII* are two currents of water, one tepid and the other icy. The difference is to be noted, but it is also to be noted that the water is never wine".<sup>14</sup> This may not be altogether just,

<sup>13</sup> *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, p. 205.

<sup>14</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 292.

but it at least shows how critics who come to *Henry VIII* from *Antony and Cleopatra* or *The Tempest* are seized by a sense of puzzlement. On the other hand, there is G. Wilson Knight who calls *Henry VIII* "Shakespeare's grandest play".<sup>15</sup>

One easy way out of the difficulty would be to assume that there is in the play work by other hands than Shakespeare's—Fletcher's, perhaps. Or we may assume that the Shakespearian authorship is confined to the Katharine scenes—didn't Johnson say that "the genius of Shakespeare comes in and goes out with Katharine"? Suppose Shakespeare began this play soon after *Richard III*—perhaps as part of yet another tetralogy—but left it incomplete at the end of the first Act; took it up again later—much later—during his last years in London; and tried a new experiment in historical drama, as *Cymbeline* had been a new experiment in comedy; but weariness overtaking him or the intractability of the subject-matter daunting him, he left it what it is, deciding to explore the *genre* no further? It might have happened this way too!

One interesting feature of this play is the lively understanding shown by the people in the affairs of the Court and the State. Even in the earlier history plays, the people are not left out. In the Jack Cade scenes of course the people *are* the play, though presently the swelling wave is seen to subside as quickly as it had risen; but even where the main interest is in the baronial squabble, the common people figure at least as spectators if not also as actors in the drama. John Palmer writes:

"Shakespeare never allows his political heroes to posture in an empty land. There is always people. *London—A Street—Enter Two Citizens Meeting*. The street may be shifted to Rome. It may be a forum or a battlefield. But always, sooner or later, it comes to remind us that there are humble folk tied to the wheel of history".<sup>16</sup>

But in *Henry VIII*, the citizens (they are Gentlemen now!) are almost a Chorus and talk in II. i about Buckingham's fall seeing in the hand of Cardinal Wolsey and in IV. i about the Coronation of Anne (Bullen), the new Queen. In II. i, the 1st Gentleman mentions the fact that the Earl of Surrey had been sent to Ireland, lest he should help his father-in-law, Buckingham, in his

<sup>15</sup> *The Shakespearian Tempest* (1953). p. 322.

<sup>16</sup> *Political Characters of Shakespeare*. p. 97.

hour of trial, and he adds : " At his return / No doubt he will requite it ". This anticipates Surrey's (III. ii. 6) :

I am joyful  
To meet the least occasion that may give me  
Remembrance of my father-in-law, the Duke,  
To be reveng'd on him.

IV. i is practically, from the Gentlemen's point of view, a continuation of II. i. The 2nd Gentleman says :

At our last encounter  
The Duke of Buckingham came from his trial.

But already much water has flowed under the Thames, for since then Katharine has fallen, and Wolsey has fallen. The pageantry of the Coronation follows, and as the Gentlemen view the new Queen, the 2nd Gentleman says with a twinkle : " I cannot blame his conscience " (IV. i. 47). They are, on the whole, better informed and more understanding than the lords, Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey, and the rest. English history is evidently getting to be more ' politic ' and less violent than in the days of the Wars of the Roses.

We have seen how Shakespeare's history plays tend as a rule to ignore the women. Constance in *King John* puts up a gallant fight for her son, Margaret by her capacity to barge into all the four plays of the Yorkist tetralogy acquires a fierce and awesome character, the Duchess of York and Queen Elizabeth move us by their sorrows, but for the rest the history plays are largely men's plays. At last, in *Henry VIII*, a woman — Queen Katharine — has an important role. And another, Anne Bullen, causes the crisis. And a third — a child yet, Elizabeth — is the hope of the future. Can it be that, in writing *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare wished to write a history play in which Woman should come to her own ? Of Katharine, Edward Dowden writes :

" The presence of a noble sufferer, — one who was grievously wronged, and who by a plain loyalty to what is faithful and true, by a disinterestedness of soul, and enduring magnanimity, passes out of all passion and personal resentment into the reality of things, in which much indeed of pain remains, but no ignoble wrath or shallow bitterness of heart ".<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Shakspeare : His Mind and Art*, p. 414.

The history plays are neither conventional comedy nor conventional tragedy. Richard III, no doubt, is a rare criminal, almost an absolute villain. But even the worst criminal is basically a fool as well — as C. S. Lewis has argued about the Satan of *Paradise Lost*. All crime is ultimately mere folly, for crime doesn't pay — not in the long run, and often not even in the short run. There is 'tragedy' in *Richard II*, *1 Henry IV*, and *2 Henry VI*, but it eludes our cool dialectical grasp. In his summing-up of the history plays, Rossiter makes this important point :

"In History Shakespeare felt that men were constrained to be much less than their full selves. He knew the burden of princehood: the Ceremony lines alone would proclaim it. All the Lancasters are less than full men. None is himself. . . . Richard does try to be himself, full kingly length. He finds a shadow in a mirror. Only the other Richard — Gloucester — can say, 'I am myself alone'. And *he* is the Devil, spinning the orb on his thumb. Now Comedy is the field of human shortcoming; and therefore Shakespeare's History, at its greatest, *had* to be comic. What isn't Comic History in the Histories is what I can only call 'Obscure tragedy' ".<sup>18</sup>

Did Shakespeare try to make *Henry VIII*, not *obscure*, but *real* tragedy? But he was too much in trammels to the hard facts of recent history. So he made it a moralistic pageant on the fickleness of princely favour and the vanity of human ambition. The Prologue makes this aspect of the play quite clear :

Think ye see  
The very persons of our noble story  
As they were living; think you see them great.  
And follow'd with the general throng and sweat  
Of thousand friends; then, in a moment, see  
How soon this mightiness meets misery.

But the Katharine story is more than its 'dying fall', for Shakespeare has invested her with queenly dignity and touched her with the heroic and the tragic. For the rest, *Henry VIII* was Shakespeare's farewell to the Court, as *The Tempest* was his farewell to the stage. As in the later romances, here too there is the stress on the merely spectacular; and the future is with a Marina, an Imogen, a Perdita, a Miranda, and now with the just christened Elizabeth. Every King has failed the country, one way or another

<sup>18</sup> *Angel with Horns*, p. 63.

way ; may not a princess succeed where the Kings have failed ? Shakespeare of course has the advantage of having lived through the reign of Queen Elizabeth whose *birth* he is celebrating in the play : this naturally colours his picture with the hues of romance, and Cranmer's 'prophecy' thus becomes no more than a poetic recordation of the familiar Tudor myth that a benevolent Providence was shaping England's 'ends', however much her Kings and politicians might have rough-hewed them. Being a Festival Play written for the wedding of James I's daughter to the Elector Palatine, Shakespeare added such touches as were likely to please his audience. A princess is born, a princess is baptised, and this princess has her country's future firmly in her hands. Nay more :

Nor shall this peace sleep with her ; but as when  
The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix,  
Her ashes new create another heir  
As great in admiration as herself.  
So shall she leave her blessedness to one . . .

"The immortality of England's sovereignty", says Wilson Knight commenting on this passage, "is thus nobly symbolised in terms of the phoenix".<sup>19</sup>

However loose in its construction, however uncertain in its style, there is no doubt the play makes backward glances and dares to look ahead. Buckingham's speech (II. i. 107ff) as he is led to his execution almost bridges the distance between Bosworth and the present time. When Henry VII summoned his first Parliament, it was attended only by 29 lay peers — the rest had perished during the colossal holocaust of the Wars of the Roses. Decreased in numbers, the Barons survived in attenuated power and prestige. There were no more territorial barons like Warwick the King-Maker who in his heyday feasted daily some 30,000 companions and retainers, and was soldier, statesman, and diplomatist rolled in one. It is now possible for Cardinal Wolsey to eliminate Buckingham without much fuss, to contain the Queen's influence, and discreetly control the King himself. After Henry VII's long reign (1485-1509) of consolidation, Henry VIII became King at rather a young age, and Shakespeare's play covers a period of 13 years from the proceedings against Buckingham

<sup>19</sup> *The Shakespearean Tempest*, p. 322.

in 1520 to the baptism of Princess Elizabeth in 1533. The play dramatises three 'falls' — Buckingham's, Katharine's, Wolsey's — and one averted fall, that of Cranmer (though historically this belongs to the year 1544). Reading *Henry VIII* after *Richard III* produces in us the same feeling that reading *The Winter's Tale* after *Othello* produces. Buckingham himself feels that, whereas his father had been executed by Richard III without a trial, his own king, Henry VIII, had given him a trial and listened to his defence. Henry VIII is cunning, egotistical, lustful, sanctimonious, but even so he is an improvement upon Richard III. And with Elizabeth things would be much better. And the further future might be very much better still. There was no reason why Shakespeare should not have taken his farewell of the Court with such an 'optimistic' play about the future course of English history. If Henry V was the 'best' of the kings, and a warrior-king as well, Elizabeth was to prove 'Gloriana', the beloved of the people. To hint at the splendours of the reign of Elizabeth at the climactic moment in *Henry VIII* was indeed to give the entire bunch of history plays a sense of enveloping unity and even to send out creepers of promise into the future. As Bullough puts it,

"If in the symphonic pattern of English history as Shakespeare saw it *Henry V* was a heroic movement glowing between the sombre and anguished moods of other reigns, *Henry VIII* is a resplendent Finale, ritualistically expanding through conflict into grace and happy augury".<sup>20</sup>

And so *Henry VIII* both makes a fitting end to the great historical cycle and connects naturally with the Romances of the 'last period'.

<sup>20</sup> *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. IV p. 450.

CHAPTER IX  
THE POEMS

I

IN THE WAKE OF OVID

While still at Stratford-upon-Avon, or more probably while he was serving (if we are to believe Aubrey who had it from Beeston) as a schoolmaster in the country, like many of his contemporaries Shakespeare too wholeheartedly surrendered to Ovid, and especially the *Metamorphoses*. Other authors, English, Italian, or French, he no doubt read and enjoyed and made use of when he could, but Ovid seems to have been a bedside book almost. "It was only with Ovid", writes M. M. Reese, "with his frank delight in sex and his receptiveness to every sort of myth and legend, that Shakespeare had any real affinity, and the *Metamorphoses*, especially the first two Books, he used more than any other work in any language, returning to it again and again for plots, characters, imagery and verbal inspiration".<sup>1</sup> What most appealed to Shakespeare was Ovid's propensity to make poetry out of everything—life, Nature, fancy, whimsy, fantasy, the exceptional, the stale, the high and mighty, the petty and low, the seemingly serious, the obviously trivial—and Shakespeare in his turn tried his prentice hand at a poem or two of his own. Arthur Golding's metrical translation of the *Metamorphoses* first appeared in 1567, and a copy of the original now in the Bodleian at Oxford is supposed to have belonged to Shakespeare. It seems to be reasonably certain that he could read and find his way to the heart of Latin speech and modes of feeling and thought, for we have it from Francis Meres :

"As the soule of *Euphorbus* was thought to liue in *Pythagoras* : so the sweete wittie soule of *Ouid* liues in mellifluous & hony-tongued *Shakes-*

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare : His World and His Work*, p. 390.



peare, witnes his *Venus* and *Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his priuate friends, &c."

If *Titus Andronicus* was a Senecan exercise, if *The Comedy of Errors* was a Plautine variation, then surely *Venus and Adonis* was an Ovidian flight of fancy. When Shakespeare came to London, he probably brought with him *Venus and Adonis*, at least parts of it; perhaps he had the image of *The Rape of Lucrece* also in his mind; he might have composed a few sonnets too. In 1593, Richard Field — Shakespeare's Stratford boyhood friend and now a printer in London — was ready to print *Venus and Adonis*, as licensed by Archbishop Whitgift of Canterbury (formerly Bishop of Worcester). In the dedication to the Earl of Southampton, whom Shakespeare had evidently come to know a little earlier (probably he was of the Earl's household when the theatres were closed in London on account of the plague), Shakespeare vowed "to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour". This proved to be *The Rape of Lucrece*, which was also printed by Field, though published by Master Harrison Senior in 1594. Of the two poems, *Venus* was more popular than *Lucrece*, running into 11 editions by 1617 (and 16 before 1640), as against 6 editions of the latter during the same period (and 8 before 1640). Meres's reference to Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets among his private friends" shows that these (at least the bulk of them) were written before 1598. Two of these sonnets (138, 144) appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599), printed by William Jaggard; and a short obscure poem, *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, appeared in a volume, *Loves Martyr*, published in 1601 in honour of Sir John Salusbury. The Sonnets as a whole were, however, published for the first time — probably from a "stolne, and surreptitious" copy — in 1609, by Thomas Thorpe. The *Sonnets* volume also included *A Lover's Complaint*, over 300 lines in 7-line (rime royal) stanza form, and we have to assume that it is by Shakespeare too. If the *Sonnets* volume was published without Shakespeare's approval (as is likely enough), he took no steps to publish an authoritative edition. But there were no reprints either till 1640, when John Benson issued the *Sonnets* again, omitting eight and regrouping the rest under headings of his own fabrication, and even taking liberties with the text by changing pro-

sons in such a way as to suggest that some of the sonnets were addressed not to a man, but a woman. The 1609 edition, whether it was a piratical venture or no, thus remains for all practical purposes the standard text of the *Sonnets*.

Unless we concede that *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*, which was published in 1591, was really the Bad Quarto of Shakespeare's *King John*, *Venus and Adonis* should be deemed his first published work. It was followed by *Titus Andronicus*, *The Contention* (Bad Quarto of 2 *Henry VI*), *The Taming of A Shrew* (Bad Quarto of *The Shrew*), and *The Rape of Lucrece*, all of which appeared in 1594. Was it the great popularity of *Venus and Adonis* that tempted the 'pirates' to bring out the Bad Quartos of 2 & 3 *Henry VI* and *A Shrew* during 1594-5? Not only was the popularity of *Venus* and (to a lesser degree) that of *Lucrece* a fact, it was also qualified by what we should now call 'highbrow' derogation. Gabriel Harvey made this tell-tale note :

"The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeares Venus, & Adonis : but his Lucrece, and his tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, haue it in them, to please the wiser sort".

The following epigram is credited to John Weever, the date being 1599 :

Rose-checkt *Adonis* with his amber tresses,  
Faire fire-hot *Venus* charming him to loue her,  
Chaste *Lucretia* virgine-like her dresses,  
Prowd lust-stung *Tarquine* seeking still to proue her <sup>2</sup>

In one of the *Parnassus* plays, Gullio says :

"Let this duncified worlde esteeme of Spencer and Chaucer, I'll wor-shipp sweet Mr. Shakespeare, and to honour him will lay his *Venus* and *Adonis* under my pillowe, as wee read of one. . . . (I am sure he was a kinge) slept with Homer under his bed's heade".

In another of the *Parnassus* plays, Judicio says :

Who loues not *Adons* loue, or *Lucrece* rape ?  
His sweeter verse containes hart trobbing line,  
Could but a graver subiect him content,  
Without loues foolish lazy languishment.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare : A Study of Facts and Problems* (1930), Vol. II, p. 199.

Another contemporary, John Davies of Hereford, was more outspoken still in his criticism :

Making lewd Venus, with eternal Lines  
To tie Adonis to her love's designs :  
Fine wit is show'n therein : but finer 'twere  
If not attired in such bawdy gear.  
But be it as it will : the coyest dames,  
In private read it for their Closet-games :  
For, sooth to say, the Lines so draw them on  
To the Venerian speculation.

"It is strange to find", writes Reese, "Shakespeare thus indicted as a purveyor of aphrodisiac poetry, but this was certainly his early reputation ; and with people who liked to read poetry but lacked the opportunity or the inclination to go to the theatre, it probably continued to be his reputation"<sup>3</sup>

Shakespeare's first reputation as a writer was indeed that of an English Ovid. The university men themselves smelt "too much of that writer *Ovid*", as we read in *The Returne from Parnassus*, but Shakespeare put "them all downe, I and *Ben Jonson* too". What his contemporaries were delighted to find in Shakespeare's poetry was the cloying sweetness of the honeyed verse laden with fantasy and touched by 'venery'. Both *Venus* and *Lucrece* trafficked with sensuality seasoned with correct doses of morality. The *Sonnets* were 'love' poems, but sharply peppered with a few 'hate' poems. *The Phoenix and the Turtle* came a little later, but that was a 'love' poem too, though it was a terribly obscure poem as well. And *A Lover's Complaint* and the Shakespearian contributions to *The Passionate Pilgrim* also played varied tunes on the theme of 'love'. There was thus ample justification for Shakespeare's contemporary reputation as the laureate of love, — almost the English incarnation of Ovid.

<sup>3</sup> *Shakespeare : His World and His Work*, p. 380.

## II

## VENUS AND ADONIS

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, one of the servants tells Christopher Sly (Induction, ii. 47) :

Dost thou love pictures ? We will fetch thee straight  
Adonis painted by a running brook,  
And Cytherea all in sedges hid . . .

The Lord adds :

We'll show thee lo as she was a maid  
And how she was beguil'd and surpris'd,  
As lively painted as the deed was done.

These are verily the themes of *Venus* and *Lucrece*, and Walter Raleigh boldly says that "it would not be rash to say outright that both the poems were suggested by pictures, and must be read and appreciated in the light of that fact".<sup>4</sup> Further, it has been suggested by T. W. Baldwin that 4 of the sonnets in *The Passionate Pilgrim* were a first sketch of the Venus-Adonis story,<sup>5</sup> belonging perhaps to the earliest (Stratford) phase of Shakespeare's writing. In the sonnet numbered 4, Venus courts Adonis unashamedly :

But whether unripe years did want conceit,  
Or he refus'd to take her figured proffer,  
The tender nibbler would not touch the bait,  
But smile and jest at every gentle offer.

In 6, Venus observes Adonis taking a bath, and wishes she were the brook ; in 9, Venus takes her stand upon a hill, and when Adonis comes with his hounds she tries to seduce him, but he merely blushes and flees, leaving her all alone ; and, in 11, she makes yet another audacious move to win his love, but he "would not take her meaning nor her pleasure". The rudiments of the story — the forward Venus (Cytherea), the reluctant Adonis, the hill-side, the hounds, the boar-hunt — are all here, and it was

<sup>4</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> *On the Literary Genetics of Shakespeare's Poems and Sonnets* (1950), p. 44.

on these perhaps that he elaborated the fuller and richer narrative poem. In dwelling on this theme once tentatively, and presently in terms of exhaustive elaboration, — in making the woman the pursuer and the boy the resolute repulser of her advances, — was Shakespeare obtaining some kind of vicarious satisfaction, paying off old scores for his own too ready submission to Anne Hathaway's charms and seductions? Was Shakespeare contrasting "this unpleasing picture of mature female lechery preying on youthful male coyness... with the normal relation of the sexes in the episode of the stallion and the breeding jennet"?<sup>6</sup> Or was Shakespeare, as argued by D. C. Allen, drawing the important distinction between the improper chase of the beloved and the meritorious chase of the civil in our midst? "Venus hunts Adonis; Adonis hunts the boar. The first hunt is the soft hunt of love; the second is the hard hunt of life".<sup>7</sup> The seduction of Adonis: the chase of the breeding jennet: the hunt of the wild boar — all three 'chases' are thus meaningfully presented for comparison and contrast. It was characteristic of Elizabethan taste in poetry that the men and women of Shakespeare's time could respond to *all* the levels of meaning in *Venus and Adonis*, and see in it much more than an opportunity for "Venerian speculation".

*Venus and Adonis* is woven out of divers strands taken from the *Metamorphoses*. There is Venus warning Adonis of boars and other wild animals (Book X):

Encounter not the kynd of beastes whom nature armed hath,  
For dowl thou buy thy prayse too deere procuring thee sum scath..  
The cruell Boares beare thunder in theyr hooked tushes, and  
Exceeding force and feercelesse is in Lyons to withstand.

And, in fact, Adonis is later wounded to death by a boar. There is also the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, in which the woman is bold, and the boy is bashful and reluctant (Book IV); "he wist not what love was". Further, there is the Narcissus myth of self-love in Book III. In bringing these elements together, Shakespeare conceived his poem (in Bullough's words) "as a study in the coyness of masculine adolescence, the frenzy

<sup>6</sup> John Buxton, *Elizabethan Taste* (1963), pp. 296-7.

<sup>7</sup> *Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies Presented to F. P. Wilson* (1959), p. 106.

of female longing, with a debate on physical love and procreation".<sup>8</sup>

The theme, Shakespeare's youth, his Ovidian inspiration, all make for a riot of sentiment—and even sensuality—and the loading of every rift with conventional poetic ore. Ivor Brown finds in the poem "a carnal Titianesque richness of beauty... neatness of touch... the cleverness of phrase which an age, so conscious of 'conceits', particularly relished".<sup>9</sup> The people who read *Venus* for the first time hadn't known the Shakespeare of *Twelfth Night*, *Antony and Cleopatra* or *The Winter's Tale*—not even the Shakespeare of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Romeo and Juliet*. It was not surprising that they should be carried away by this poem which set the theme of one-sided sexual ardour to a prolonged rumble of music they had not known before. The 'tragedy' is set forth in a series of arrested actions or postures that seem inevitably to lead to the catastrophe. First, Venus makes a bold bid for Adonis' love, but he holds himself back—

She red and hot as coals of glowing fire,  
He red for shame, but frosty in desire.

She is like an 'empty eagle', he is her prey; she pleads with him fervently that he should "make use of time, let not advantage slip"; she warns him that he shouldn't play Nareissus who "died to kiss his shadow in the brook"; and so in abandoned sensuality she does all she can to strike fire in Adonis, but all in vain. At last he jerks himself out of her embrace and makes a dash to reach his horse. At this point (l. 259) is introduced the episode of the breeding jennet attracting Adonis' courser, and these two moving off into the wood, answering Nature's peremptory summons to mate. This episode, which has merely chagrined Adonis, further inflames Venus' desire, and hence she redoubles her blandishments and sophistries. They debate the issue with word and deed, and the vicissitudes of the struggle exasperate them both; he wounds her with a look and she swoons, he caresses her back to life and she renews her solicitations; and once he tries to speak kindly and fairly to her:

<sup>8</sup> *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. Vol. I, p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> *Shakespeare* (Comet Book), p. 131.

if any love you owe me,  
Measure my strangeness with my unripe years;  
Before I know myself, seek not to know me.

But she is impatient, her longing is urgent and insistent, and only when she is checkmated by a rebuff "worse than Tantalus" that she will let him go. To her eloquent 'Gospel of Love' —

Therefore, despite of fruitless chastity,  
Love-lacking vestals, or self-loving nuns,  
That on earth would breed a scarcity  
And barren dearth of daughters and of sons,  
Be prodigal . . . —

he gives the harsh self-righteous answer (l. 789) :

I hate not love, but your device in love,  
That lends embracements unto every stranger.  
You do it for increase! O strange excuse,  
When reason is the bawd to lust's abuse!

He follows it up with a stylised passage contrasting love and lust, a precocious piece of distilled wisdom for a boy so young :

Love comforteth like sunshine after rain,  
But Lust's effect is tempest after sun;  
Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain:  
Lust's winter comes ere summer half be done.  
Love surfeits not: Lust like a glutton dies.  
Love is all truth: Lust full of forged lies.

Then judiciously, Adonis adds : " More I could tell . . . The text is old, the orator too green ". ('Green' is also the word used in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, Sonnet 4 line 2, to describe Adonis.)

Leaving Venus finally, Adonis glides away into the night, and she is left in the dark (817-76). When the long night ends, she hears the sounds of the chase, and at once she fears the worst (905) :

This way she runs, and now she will no further,  
But back retires to rate the boar for murder.

She has premonitions, she fights back her fears ; but she sees at last " the foul boar's conquest on her fair delight " (1030). Then follows her lament, and her prophecy (1135) :

Since thou art dead, lo, here I prophesy  
 Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend :  
 It shall be waited on with jealousy,  
 Find sweet beginning but unsavoury end . . .

It shall be fickle, false, and full of fraud,  
 Bud and be blasted in a breathing while . . .

It shall be sparing, and too full of riot,  
 Teaching decrepit age to tread the measures . . .  
 It shall be raging mad, and silly mild,  
 Make the young old, the old become a child.

A purple flower check'ed with white springs up in Adonis' blood spilled on the ground, and she resolves she will never be parted from the flower ; although Adonis is dead, she will thus keep alive his memory in her bosom.

Obviously *Venus and Adonis* is a poem commemorating unequal unrequited love. Although noble idealistic sentiments are put into Adonis' mouth, he talks more like a book and less like a boy, whereas Venus' passion has a wild recognisable intensity. That the 'younger sort' liked the poem is not surprising, and that in describing love's excess the young poet used also language in its excess is understandable enough. Where one simile would do, there are two or three tumbling one after another :

Even as the wind is hush'd before it raineth,  
 Or as the wolf doth grin before he barketh,  
 Or as the berry breaks before it staineth,  
 Or like the deadly bullet of a gun,  
 His meaning struck her ere his words begun . . .

Like a wild bird being tam'd with too much handling,  
 Or as the fleet-foot roe that's tired with chasing,  
 Or like the froward infant still'd with dandling,  
 He now obeys . . .

The 6-line stanza is really the last 6 lines (a quatrain and a couplet) of a Shakespearian sonnet, and the general luxuriousness taken for granted, it is the couplet that sometimes fails on account of the weak rhymes (one, bone ; woe, so ; teeth, with), but as often at least the rhymes have a breezy clinching quality :

Whose vulture thought doth pitch the price so high  
 That she will draw his lips' rich treasure dry . . .



For he being dead, with him is beauty slain,  
And, beauty dead, black chaos comes again . . .

The latter, perhaps, distantly anticipates Othello's (III. iii. 92) : "and when I love thee not / Chaos is come again". The sensuousness of poetry like that of *Venus and Adonis* is more akin to Keats's in *Endymion* or the Indian poet Kalidasa's in *Ritusamhara* and *Kumarasambhava*. There are snaps of the landscape of Shakespeare's England, peopled by bird and beast and flower — the lark and the nightingale, the hare and the horse, the milch-doe and the hound, the plum and the berries, primrose bank and pleasant fountains. "These glimpses of Stratford", says Dover Wilson, "are indeed so much happier than the descriptions of the efforts by amorous Venus to awaken passion in her Adonis, that it is not difficult to see where Shakespeare's heart lay".<sup>10</sup>

### III

#### THE RAPE OF LUCRECE

*Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* are companion poems like Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. "Sick-thoughted Venus" is one side of the picture, "lust-breathed Tarquin" the other side : ardent female desire, criminal male lust. Adonis is presented as a boy of sixteen, and his failure is a failure of the vital consciousness. He doesn't apparently know what all Venus' violent agitation is about. It is indifference — even ignorance or inadequacy — more than disgust or repulsion that dictates his behaviour. Besides, the Venus-Adonis story is a myth, and has accordingly the sanctions of a myth. One could almost view it from a distance, uncomplicated by personal involvement. Besides, the death of Adonis is an accident of the chase, and doesn't arise from the main situation, unless we choose to attribute to Venus' words —

I prophesy thy death, my living sorrow,  
If thou encounter with the boar tomorrow —

the efficacy, or malignity, of a curse. On the other hand, the tragedy of *Lucrece* is presented in strictly human terms. It is

<sup>10</sup> *The Essential Shakespeare*, p. 56.

precipitated by the clash of character and action. We are not dealing with a goddess and a boy but with two adult human beings fully responsible for their actions. Although *Lucrece* is but a narrative poem of almost desolating length, it does contain the germs of a poignant tragedy. But as yet Shakespeare is lost in the whirl of words, the improvisation of rhetoric, and the embroidery of moral sentiments, rather than in making language a function of a developing dramatic situation moving towards a terrible climax and an overwhelming catastrophe.

There are two references to the Lucrece story in *Titus Andronicus* (II. i. 108 and III. i. 297) :

Take this of me : Lucrece was not more chaste  
Than this Lavinia, Bassianus' love . . .

If Lucius live, he will requite your wrongs  
And make proud Saturnine and his emperess  
Beg at the gates like Tarquin and his queen.

The theme of 'chaste' Lucrece was evidently stirring in the 'sub-conscious', and disgust for Tarquin went alongside of admiration for Lucrece. In his *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (Vol. I), Bullough has printed as probable sources the Lucrece story as given in Chaucer's *The Legende of Good Women*, a passage from Ovid's *Fasti* (also Gower's translation as *Festivals, or Romane Calendar*), and the story of Tarquin's outrage as related in William Painter's *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566). The story is substantially the same in all the versions,—Tarquin abusing the hospitality extended to him and ravishing the chaste Lucrece, Lucrece killing herself after informing her husband and father, and these two avenging the wrong. While the argument more or less summarises the Ovidian narrative, the poet itself concerns itself only with Tarquin's fatal visit to Collatine's house and the consequences. One sordid circumstance is common to all the versions, viz., Tarquin threatening to kill a slave, lay him by Lucrece's side, and make it appear that she had lusted with him. This is the horrible threat that at last silences Lucrece for the nonce. Other details too Shakespeare has borrowed, but once again he has preferred narrative elaboration to dramatic urgency, balancing stylisation to the undertones of muted utterance.

If *A Lover's Complaint* (which was published along with the *Sonnets* in 1609) was really written immediately before *The Rape*

of *Lucrece*, it would be easy to account for the similarity in theme, language and versification. It is a lovely woman speaking, having stooped to folly and finding too late that her man had only played with her affections. Her plight is hardly better than Venus', and the man is not much of an improvement on Tarquin. As she reminisces, her load of agonised memory rations itself out in the smooth-carven seven-line stanzas :

For lo, his passion, but an art of craft,  
Even there resolv'd my reason into tears ;  
There my white stole of chastity I daff'd,  
Shook off my sober guards and civil fears . . .

Thus merely with the garment of a Grace  
The naked and concealed Fiend he cover'd,  
That th' unexperient gave the temple place,  
Which, like a cherubim, above them hover'd.  
Who, young and simple, would not be so lover'd ?  
Ay me ! I fell ; and yet do question make  
What I should do again for such a sake.

The hopeless wailing of the helpless ! "She suffers", says E. I. Fripp, "but not from conscience. Her lover is an Adonis fired by lust of Venus, the Earl of Southampton transformed into a young Lothario . . . But he is a smooth-spoken villain, who betrays women by his flattery".<sup>11</sup> Whether or not the description fits Southampton, the wailing woman of *A Lover's Complaint* is a 'middle term' between Venus and Lucrece : the goddess who loses her minion before love's fulfilment, the woman who is abandoned by her lover and the chaste wife who is violated and driven to suicide are all expressions of the eternal feminine who between them orchestrate the music of the 'tears in things'—the death of the lover, the extinction of love, and the loss of woman's immediate jewel, Chastity.

*Lucrece* is an inverted *Macbeth*. Where Duncan as the honoured guest unsuspectingly walks into his death-trap, Lucrece as she plays the true hostess is unwittingly trapped by her guest into worse than death. Lucrece receives Tarquin with all the forms of hospitality : Tarquin violates the defenceless Lucrece : and Lucrece kills herself *after* ensuring that Tarquin will be duly punished. The action moves as if to a preordained conclusion :

<sup>11</sup> *Shakespeare : Man and Artist*, Vol. I, pp. 344-5.

as if, indeed, — even as Judith's sacrifice was necessary for the destruction of Holofernes — Lucrece's ordeal is necessary for the expulsion of the Tarquins. Lucrece is a womanly woman in her wifely devotion and angelic chastity, but when the crisis overtakes her, she naturally waxes heroic, becomes a scourge of evil, a burning brazier of self-sacrifice that cleanses the atmosphere of the corruption of sin and sloth and murderous lust.

*Lucrece* is longer than *Venus* by more than one-half, and is written in the rime royal (ababbc) measure, already used with ease and effectiveness in *A Lover's Complaint*. Each stanza, in fact, is a semi-sonnet, with half of the octave and half of the sestet soldered together, the fifth line accomplishing a closer union between the quartet and the concluding couplet than in the *Venus* 6-line stanzas. Shakespeare's metrical fluency is amazing enough, but blocks of lines like these stanzas cannot really facilitate easy narration. The "graver" matter sits heavy, and both Tarquin and Lucrece soliloquise at needless length. The story limps, but the wealth of imagery manages to hold the reader's attention till the end. Here is Tarquin talking to himself before taking the irrevocable step (232) :

Had Collatinus kill'd my son or sire,  
Or lain in ambush to betray my life,  
Or were he not my dear friend, this desire  
Might have excuse to work upon his wife,  
As in revenge or quittal of such strife ;  
But as he is my kinsman, my dear friend,  
The shame and fault finds no excuse nor end.

Macbeth too sees the whole horror of what he is about to do (I. vii. 12) :

He's here in double trust :  
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject —  
Strong both against the deed : then, as his host,  
Who should against his murderer shut the door,  
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan  
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off . . .

With eyes open Tarquin and Macbeth walk into their hells, but whereas we only hear the words that Tarquin manages to speak,

Macbeth's words seem to reproduce the very tremors of his mind, to open our eyes to the crater that is his soul. But, then, there were nearly 15 years between *Lucrece* and *Macbeth*!

The chief fault is that Shakespeare will not leave off when he might. He sets everything down, accessories and all, and hardly anything is left to the imagination. Thus, for example, of *Lucrece* sleeping in her chamber (386) :

Her lily hand her rosy cheek lies under,  
Coz'ning the pillow of a lawful kiss ;  
Who, therefore angry, seems to part in sunder.  
Swelling on either side to want his bliss ;  
Between whose hills her head entombed is ;  
Where, like a virtuous monument, she lies,  
To be admir'd of lewd unhallowed eyes.

Without the bed her other fair hand was,  
On the green coverlet ; whose perfect white  
Show'd like an April daisy on the grass,  
With pearly sweat, resembling dew of night.  
Her eyes, like marigolds, had sheath'd their light,  
And canopied in darkness sweetly lay,  
Till they might open to adorn the day.

The one appropriate comment on such painstaking luxuriance is that Shakespeare could do infinitely better in a few years' time. Thus, in a single line, Lady Macbeth describes the sleeping Duncan (II. ii. 12) :

Had he not resembled  
My father as he slept, I had done't.

Before Othello smothers Desdemona, which in his eyes will be an act of 'sacrifice', he dwells lingeringly on the imagery of light (V. ii. 7) :

Put out the light, and then put out the light.  
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,  
I can again thy former light restore,  
Should I repent me ; but once put out thy light.  
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,  
I know not where is that Promethean heat  
That can thy light relume.

This is strictly dramatic. But in describing the outrage on *Lucrece*, Shakespeare pursues the simile of storming a besieged city. Tar-

quin's speech is a 'parley', and Lucrece is "his heartless foe"! Lucrece's plea is in comparison more pointed and apt (582):

My husband is thy friend—for his sake spare me;  
Thyself art mighty—for thine own sake leave me;  
Myself a weakling—do not then ensnare me . . .

But she too cannot stop, but goes on and on. Having had his way, Tarquin leaves; and the contrasted stylisation begins again:

He like a thievish dog creeps sadly thence,  
She like a wearied lamb lies panting there . . .  
He thence departs a heavy convertite,  
She there remains a hopeless castaway

Left alone again, Lucrece rails at Night ("O comfort-killing Night, image of hell!") for several stanzas, then at Opportunity—

'Tis thou that execut'st the traitor's treason;  
Thou sets the wolf where he the lamb may get . . .  
Thou makest the vestal violate her oath;  
Thou blowest the fire when temperance is thaw'd;  
Thou smotherest honesty, thou murth'rest truth—

for a few more stanzas, then at "mis-shapen Time, copesmate of ugly Night"; she would like to know *how to curse*; and presently she realises how bootless all this railing is. Philomel's lament thus nearly exhausts itself when night ends and another day begins. Like Marion Bloom's long subconscious reverie at the end of *Ulysses*, Lucrece's extended wail (746-1078) may be looked upon as her spiralling moan of sorrow and shame, neither wholly conscious nor entirely a movement of the unconscious. The long hours of the night had to pass, and she could neither sleep nor sit up collected and quiet. The storm within had to spend itself out, and so the words form themselves in angry or melancholy strains of unpremeditated art.

When morning comes, she knows what to do. She sends for her husband and her father, and meantime there is a further ordeal of waiting, for "now 'tis stale to sigh, to weep, and groan". She recalls a painting of Priam's Troy, and that vast tragedy suits her present mood. Listening to the Player's Speech, Hamlet is particularly moved by the plight of Hecuba after Troy's fall and Priam's death. Lucrece too dwells upon this uniquely

agonising scene. Thinking of Troy's painted woes, Priam's painted wound, Hecuba's painted sorrow, and of Sinon's painted deceit, Lucrece finds in Sinon an equal to Tarquin. She is sobered because her sorrow has ancient lineage. Now her husband and her father arrive, and she tells them with dramatic brevity the name of Tarquin's crime, and stabs herself with her knife. Collatine and Lucretius her father honour her memory, and with the help of Junius Brutus and Publius Valerius avenge the outrage and rid Rome of the Tarquins.

Strangely enough, it is as much because of Lucrece's chastity (8)—

Haply that name of 'chaste' unhap'ly set  
This bateless edge on his keen appetite —

as because of her beauty that the false Tarquin lusts after her. The situation is to be dramatically repeated in *Measure for Measure*, in which Angelo suddenly lusts after Isabella who is a suppliant before him and is armed with no special glamour except the holy tint of her innocence. But *Lucrece* is no drama that is enacted, but a tapestry that is unrolled, before us. In both *Venus* and *Lucrece*, while the sentiments and the images smother us, the narrative flags. "A couple of ice-houses . . . as hard, as glittering, and as cold", said Hazlitt with a sense of exasperation. That is part of the truth, no doubt; but the other part is that these ice-houses nevertheless preserve in their purity the seeds of 'drama' which, in the fulness of time, will burst into glorious Comedy and Tragedy.

#### IV

#### SONNETS

When the adventurous Thomas Thorpe published Shakespeare's *Sonnets* — "never before Imprinted" — as a Quarto volume in 1609, he had the brain-wave to add what has since become the most discussed 'Dedication' in literature :

TO. THE. ONLIE. BEGETTER. OF.  
 THESE. INSVING. SONNETS.  
 MR. W. H. ALL. HAPPINESSE.  
 AND. THAT. ETERNITIE.  
 PROMISED.  
 BY.  
 OVR. EVER-LIVING. POET.  
 WISHETH.  
 THE. WELL-WISHING.  
 ADVENTURER. IN.  
 SETTING.  
 FORTH.

T.T.

Not the author (who was then alive), but it was the publisher that signed the dedication. And to whom? Well, that was the beginning of the confusion that has since only confounded more and more.

Since Meres mentioned Shakespeare's sugared Sonnets, the bulk of them at least must have been written before 1598. Besides, the 1590's were the glorious harvest-time of English sonneteering. Beginning with the piratical publication of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* in 1591 — the sonnets had doubtless been written some years earlier — other sonnet-sequences came out year by year: Daniel's *Delia* in 1592; Lodge's *Phillis*, as also Giles Fletcher's *Licia*, in 1593; Constable's *Diana*, Drayton's *Idea*, and Percy's *Coelia* in 1594; Barnfield's *Cynthia* and Spenser's *Amoretti* in 1595; Griffin's *Fidessa* and William Smith's *Chloris* in 1596; Robert Tofte's *Laura* in 1597, followed next year by his own *Alba*. Thomas Watson, Barnabe Barnes, Henry Lok and Nicholas Breton were among the other sonneteers of the time, and among the anonymous titles were *Zepheria*, *Diella* and *Alcilia*. The 'sonnet' as a literary form had been imported by Wyatt and Surrey, whose sonnets appeared in *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557). During the years of the sonneteering vogue (1592-8), it was not the tighter Petrarchan form with an octave and a sestet but the looser English (or 'Shakespearian') form with three quatrains and a couplet that found general currency. Some of the 'poets' passed off poems of fifteen lines or twelve lines also as 'sonnets'. It would be reasonable to suppose that most of Shakespeare's sonnets were written probably at the very height of the



fashion, say between 1592 and 1596. While the earlier sonnets probably belong to 1592-3, others were written after an interval of three years in 1595-6; and it is quite likely that a few go back to the Stratford years and a few more overflow into the 17th century. Historically, of course, it is passing strange that, although introduced as early as 1557, the 'sonnet' as a literary form should have slumbered for about 25 years, then suddenly burst into a blaze of popularity in the 1590's, and presently gone out of use again. "The concentration of most of the Elizabethan sonnet-writing into a space of ten years", says F. T. Prince, "gave it something of the air of a poetical debauch, and many have contributed to the disfavour into which the form soon fell".<sup>12</sup> Shakespeare took the 'form' from Surrey and fashioned it into a perfect instrument to play a variety of tunes, to communicate a variety of moods and contain whole worlds of thought. He was an imitator of genius, who made the most of what he had borrowed. The justification for the 'debauch' was the phosphorescent splendour of Shakespeare's own Sonnets. If there were no sonneteering vogue in the 1590's, Shakespeare by himself wouldn't have started any such fashion. On the other hand, had Shakespeare not ridden on the crest of the prevailing vogue, who will today care to read (or even read about) the sonneteers of the Elizabethan Age?

While we may tentatively fix 1593-6 as the period of composition of the *Sonnets*, there are of course no certitudes in the realm of Shakespearian scholarship. There is, for example, the sonnet numbered 107 which has proved a hornet's nest:

The mortal moon hath her eclipse endur'd,  
And the sad augurs mock their own presage;  
Uncertainties now crown themselves assur'd,  
And peace proclaims olives of endless age.

If the 'mortal moon' allusion is to Elizabeth's death, this sonnet should be dated 1603; if the reference is to the destruction of the Armada, arranged like a crescent moon, then the date would be 1588; other intermediate dates suggested are 1599-1600 (E. K. Chambers), and the Autumn of 1596 when Elizabeth emerged from the 'grand Climacteric' of her life (G. B. Harrison). If the 'mortal moon' signifies the Armada (Leslie

<sup>12</sup> *Elizabethan Poetry* (Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 2). 1960, pp. 17-8.

Hotson's idea), then the sonnets will all have to be pushed back to the 1580's. Before Hotson, Samuel Butler also had timed the sonnets between 1585-8, which would mean that, instead of *following* the sonneteering fashion, Shakespeare really *started* the fashion. But the Butler-Hotson dating raises more problems than it solves, and so it has not commanded general acceptance. The current 'orthodoxy' is still to date the *Sonnets* roughly between 1593 and 1596.<sup>13</sup>

While trying to fix the 'date' of composition of the Sonnets, scholars are obliged to rely, not only on 'external' or 'partly external and partly internal' evidence, but more and more on 'internal' evidence, the evidence of thematic and linguistic analysis. Although linguistic echoes could be sometimes deceptive, it is argued that the correspondences between the Sonnets and Shakespeare's other writings tend to concentrate in two periods, 1592-3 on the one hand and 1595-6 on the other, with an interval of 3 years between: in other words, the parallels are between the earlier sonnets and *Venus, Lucrece* and *Love's Labour's Lost* at one end and *1 and 2 Henry IV* at the other. But evidence for dating on the basis of the 'interpretation' of the Sonnets is itself to some extent linked up with the actual dating! This is the 'vicious circle' that lures scholarship and detective ingenuity—but only to defeat them in the end. "There are many footprints

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hotson, *Shakespeare's Sonnets Dated* (1949) and Butler, *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* (1899). The literature on the *Sonnets* is immense. Among the more important editions are those by Edward Dowden (1883), Thomas Tyler (1890), George Wyndham (1898), H. C. Beeching (1904), T. G. Tucker (1924), G. L. Kittredge (1938), H. E. Rollins (1944), R. M. Alden (1916), Douglas Bush & Alfred Harbage (1961), and Martin Seymour-Smith (1963). Dover Wilson's *Shakespeare's Sonnets: An Introduction for Historians and Others* has come out as a paperback, heralding his own forthcoming edition; and in *The Riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1962), besides the text of the Sonnets, there are also essays by Edward Hubler, Leslie Fielder, Stephen Spender, Northrop Frye and R. P. Blackmur. Numerous are the 'detective' studies, which range from those whimsies that set out to prove the non-Shakespearean authorship of 'Shakespeare' to those that try merely to identify the boy-patron, the rival poet, and the Dark Lady. The biographers, of course,—Sidney Lee, Frank Harris, E. K. Chambers, J. Q. Adams, Ivor Brown, M. M. Reese, A. L. Rowse, Peter Quennell, these among others,—can hardly avoid committing themselves one way or another on the question of identifications. Of recent critical studies, J. B. Leishman's *Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1961) is particularly illuminating.

around the cave of this mystery", writes Raleigh ominously, "none of them pointing in the outward direction".<sup>14</sup>

Who was "Mr. W. H."? In what sense was he the "onlie begetter"? The Sonnets seem to be addressed to a fair young man, and some few towards the end of the series to a dark woman. The Dedication would imply that Mr. W. H. is also the addressee — the fair young man — who is promised 'eternitie' by our 'ever-living poet'. Actually, two kinds of 'eternitie' are mentioned in the Sonnets: one is achieved by breed, through marriage and children, and the other through commemoration in literature. The two ideas merge as it were in 17:

Who will believe my verse in time to come,  
If it were fill'd with your most high deserts . . .  
If I could write the beauty of your eyes  
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,  
The age to come would say 'This poet lies;  
Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly faces' . . .  
But were some child of yours alive that time,  
You should live twice — in it, and in my rhyme.

The poet could promise only literary immortality; 'eternitie' through progeny is a matter to be achieved by the man himself. Thus Mr. W. H. of the Dedication should also be the aristocratic fair young man of the Sonnets. Even so, the question arises why, when 'eternitie' is already promised by the poet in the Sonnets, the publisher also should gratuitously add his own good wishes. Or does T.T. mean (what has, in fact, come about) that the mention in the Dedication itself would confer 'eternitie' as much as commemoration in the Sonnets? "Onlie begetter" should normally refer to the 'inspirer' of the 'insuing sonnets', which makes Mr. W.H. also the addressee. But if "onlie begetter" means the gatherer or procurer of the manuscript of the Sonnets (this sense is favoured by scholars like Sidney Lee and E. I. Fripp), then there is at least this capital advantage: we can read the Sonnets forgetting all about the Dedication, and Mr. W.H.

Taking the latter view first, who was this Mr. W.H. who displayed piratical dexterity by handing over to T.T. the 'copy' of the *Sonnets*? One candidate is Sir William Harvey, who

<sup>14</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 86. Another warning, by J. W. Mackail: "Here we enter on a path strewn thickly with the bleaching bones of critics" (*The Approach to Shakespeare*, 1930, p. 110).

married the Countess of Southampton in 1598. (But why 'Mr.'? Echo answers 'Why'!) Another candidate, sponsored by Sidney Lee and others, is 'William Hall', an inconspicuous person (perhaps related to Shakespeare's son-in-law, John Hall) who somehow secured the 'copy' and passed it on to T.T., thus winning the immortality of the Dedication. And, in fact, the ingenious argument has been advanced that "Mr. W. H. All" of the Dedication is really (with the omission of the stop after H) "Mr. W. Hall".

Taking the former view that the addressee is also the dedicatee, again there are two principal (besides several other) candidates. "I myself feel little doubt", says E. K. Chambers, "that he was Herbert, the son of the Earl of Pembroke".<sup>15</sup> William Lord Herbert was born only in 1580, and so he would be barely 13 in 1593. Chambers thinks that the friendship between Shakespeare and William (Lord) Herbert lasted 3 years (1595-8), during which period the Sonnets were written. It has been established that an attempt was made in 1595 to get the 15-year old Herbert married to Sir George Carey's daughter, and this fact also strengthens his candidature. The initials 'W.H.' too fit the dedication, though there is no answer to the question raised by the suppression of the 'title' and its substitution by a plain 'Mr.' An even stronger candidate is Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare had dedicated both *Venus* and *Lucrece*. As he was born in 1573, he would be 20-3 when the Sonnets were written. There were negotiations, which ultimately came to nothing, to arrange a marriage between him and Lord Burghley's grand-daughter. (If Southampton was the addressee but not the dedicatee, it is plausible that his step-father, William Harvey, chanced upon the Sonnets and was persuaded to hand them over to T.T.) As for the 'title' and the 'initials', well, it was a double camouflage to reverse the initials and dwindle the 'Earl' into 'Mr.' Like the double-entry in the Bishop of Worcester's register about Shakespeare's marriage, this double blind too cannot be rationally explained.

A non-aristocratic candidate too has been put forward, on the strength of Sonnets 20, 135, and 136, by Oscar Wilde and others. Sonnet 20 is especially significant :

<sup>15</sup> *Sources for a Biography of Shakespeare* (1946), p. 70.

A woman's face, with Nature's own hand painted,  
 Hast thou, the Master Mistress of my passion;  
 A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted  
 With shifting change, as is false woman's fashion;  
 An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,  
 Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;  
 A man in hue all hues in his controlling,  
 Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.  
 And for a woman wert thou first created;  
 Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,  
 And by addition me of thee defeated  
 By adding one thing to my purpose nothing ...

"A man in hue all *hues*" is supposed to be William Hughes, a boy actor who played women's parts in Shakespeare's plays. It is true no record of any such actor has come down to us, but perhaps — perhaps — there was such a 'lovely boy' after all, and he inspired strong attachment in Shakespeare! Did Hughes also 'steal' the Dark Woman? He *must* have, if he is properly to qualify; at any rate, the initials fit like a glove. Although a character in Joyce's *Ulysses* calls the Hughes theory a paradoxical, if brilliant, hypothesis,<sup>16</sup> it is wise to reject it. If the Sonnets were addressed to any one in particular, it was to the Earl of Southampton during the years 1593-6; and, consequently, Mr. W.H. too was very likely either Southampton or William Harvey.

The Sonnets are 154 in number, of which 126 is not a 'sonnet' at all but the 'Envoy' (in 6 couplets) to the preceding 125. The last 2 sonnets (153, 154) stand apart, being mere renderings of exercises in fancy by a Byzantine poet. Marianus, on Cupid and the filiations between eroticism and bathing. Although 1-125 are apparently addressed to an uncommonly handsome young man, they were written over a period of years, the later sonnets (100-125) some 3 years after the main bulk. Again, although 128-152 are in appearance a miscellany, most of them are evidently addressed to a dark woman. In the longer group (1-125), while 1-17 pursue the argument (already, or independently, elaborated in *Venus*) that it is Beauty's duty to breed and perpetuate itself, 78-86 introduce the complication of a rival poet who is finding favour in the eyes of the young nobleman to whom the sonnets are addressed:

<sup>16</sup> *Ulysses* (The Modern Library), p. 196.

So oft have I invok'd thee for my Muse,  
And found such fair assistance in my verse.  
As every alien pen hath got my use,  
And under thee their poesy disperse . . . (78)

But now my gracious numbers are decay'd,  
• And my sick Muse doth give another place . . . (79)

O, how I faint when I of you do write,  
Knowing a better spirit doth use your name . . . (80)

Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,  
Bound for the prize of all-too-precious you,  
That did my ripe thoughts in my brain inhearse,  
Making their tomb the womb wherein they grew . . . (86)

In between, the Sonnets contain expostulations regarding the decline in the favour or affection shown to the poet, recriminations (or at least mild complaints) about the addressee stealing the poet's mistress (33-42), and general philosophical speculations on both the ravages of Time and the defeat of Time by true Love that beyonds Reason itself. Middleton Murry marks 5 stages in the friendship between the poet and his handsome young patron. There are the first months of acquaintance growing into intimacy, followed by a period of absence on Shakespeare's part :

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,  
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired . . . (27)

There is, perhaps, a gentle murmur of protest that, notwithstanding so affluent a patron, the poet should be obliged to 'travel' and tire himself to eke out his livelihood. Now worse follows, for the poet learns that his fair friend has deceived him with his false mistress. For a time it is a stunning blow :

my sun one early morn did shine  
With all triumphant splendour on my brow ;  
But out, alack ! he was but one hour mine,  
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now . . . (33)

But soon he puts on the mask of resignation :

No more be griev'd at that which thou hast done . . .  
All men make faults, and even I in this,  
Authorising thy trespass with compare,

Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,  
 Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are ;  
 For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense ... (35)

It is only a mask, for he is far more outspoken when he addresses his mistress (supposing, of course, that this dark enchantress is also the woman whom the aristocratic friend has stolen during Shakespeare's travels) :

Is't not enough to torture me alone.  
 But slave to slavery my sweet'st friend must be ? ...  
 Of him, my self, and thee, I am forsaken ;  
 A torment thrice three-fold thus to be crossed ... (133)

For thou betraying me, I do betray  
 My nobler part to my gross body's treason ... (151)

In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn,  
 But thou art twice forsworn, to me love swearing :  
 In act thy bed-vow broke, and new faith torn  
 In vowing new hate after new love bearing ... (152)

When the poet is back from his 'travels', to the double blow of his mistress and his friend jointly deceiving him, is added the fresh blow of a rival poet basking in the sunshine of the friend's favour.<sup>17</sup> Disillusioned all round, the poet feels like one who has awakened from a dream :

Farewell ! thou art too dear for my possessing ...  
 So thy great gift, upon misprison growing,  
 Comes home again, on better judgement making.  
 Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter :  
 In sleep a king, but waking no such matter. (87)

Was it when Shakespeare was brooding on all this that he saw as in a vision the climactic scene in *2 Henry IV* — the 'rejection' of Falstaff ? Be that as it may, his success as a dramatist and growing economic independence gave Shakespeare the right to stand on his own, and to review the past without illusion and without resentment. He became friends again with his former patron, but on something like a basis of equality and correct formality.

<sup>17</sup> The rival poet has been variously identified with Chapman, Spenser, Marlowe, and Drayton, but if it was anybody in particular it was very probably Chapman whose *Shadow of Night* came out in 1594.

A friend, a mistress, a rival poet — disillusion following the treble betrayal — the 'peace' of exhaustion and philosophical resignation following the total Kathartie experience : such would appear to be the 'theme' of the *Sonnets*. And the writing itself was like going over the same experience once again, and distilling out of it all the exhilaration, all the abasement, all the chagrin, all the agony, and also the comparative 'calm' following the rough and stormy weather. If such be the 'content' of the *Sonnets*, certain questions ask to be posed and answered.<sup>18</sup>

Is Shakespeare merely projecting an imaginary, but prototypical, drama of friendship and love and betrayal and reconciliation, — as in his dramas, for example ? As against this view, it may be reasonably argued that some of the *Sonnets* — those to the Dark Lady especially — are too vivid and bitter with the 'taint' of personal involvement to be mere imaginary projections. There is, again, Sonnet 121, one of the most perfectly integrated pieces of poetry in the entire series :

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed.  
When not to he receives reproach of being,  
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed  
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing.  
For why should others' false adulterate eyes  
Give salutation to my sportive blood ?  
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,  
Which in their wills count bad what I think good ?  
No ; I am that I am ; and they that level  
At my abuses reckon up their own.  
I may be straight though they themselves be bevel ;  
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown,  
Unless this general evil they maintained :  
All men are bad, and in their badness reign.

What were the circumstances that provoked this tremendous affirmation, *I am that I am* ? There were doubtless mudslingings — innuendoes — even publications like *Willobie his Avis* (1594) with references to a W.S. — all building up a cumulative image of 'vileness'. As if the critics really *knew*, or could correctly judge ! They would drive one to the commission of the very thing they railed against ; by inferring a vileness that was not

<sup>18</sup> In the matter of the categorisation of the numerous 'theories' that have been put forward, we seem to have gone little beyond Dowden's in his *Shakespeare : His Mind and Art*, pp. 394-5 fn.



there, they would give it shape and life, till all the world took its poison from them. But no : the poet would defy them, and stand on his own, and follow his own daemon alone. Surely in this sonnet Shakespeare is not fabricating a speech for an imagined character but is transmitting through rhythmic language the very pulse-beats of his innermost life.

Is the sonnet-sequence an allegory of some sort? "The beloved person is in fact his own poetry", says Mark Van Doren, and the subject of the *Sonnets* "is the greatest possible subject, existence".<sup>19</sup> As for Mr. W.H., why should he not be 'William Himself'? The young friend might be Ideal Manhood. In the *Sonnets*, Shakespeare is exploring through the mythical figures of the dark woman, the false rival and the fair friend the myriad circles and slopes of Hell and Purgatory, hewing a pathway to the ultimate Paradise. As against this view, it may be stated that many of the sonnets have such a feverish urgency, such a scalding sense of actuality, that a mere allegorical interpretation cannot fit all the 'facts of the case'. Lines like the following have such a lacerating and burning quality that they could only have risen from the depths of a sense of abysmal shame, not have been coldly formulated to build an argument :

If eyes, corrupt by over-partial looks,  
Be anchor'd in the bay where all men ride,  
Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forged hooks,  
Whereto the judgement of my heart is tied? . . . (137)

Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,  
That in the very refuse of thy deeds  
There is such strength and warrantise of skill  
That in my mind thy worst all best exceeds? (150)

No, indeed, the *Sonnets* are no anaemic allegory ; rather are they nearer to being the "precious life-blood of a master spirit".

Are the *Sonnets*, then, partly autobiographical and partly allegorical? Of the interpretative critics, Wilson Knight has, perhaps, ridden the allegorical horse more than others, but he also sees the clear hard autobiographical base. The fair boy and the dark lady (it is immaterial *who* they were, but two such persons were certainly there) were the Apollonian and Dionysian

<sup>19</sup> *Shakespeare*, pp. 5-6.

ulls in Shakespeare's life, and these ministered to Shakespeare's own innate 'bisexual' urges. Wilson Knight thus sees the Sonnets "as a semi-dramatic expression of a clearly defined process of integration pointing towards the realisation of a high state of being",<sup>20</sup> penetrating beyond Good and Evil (as in Sonnet 121). The Sonnets do indeed "define the spiritual principle behind all Shakespeare's work".<sup>21</sup> Shakespeare "led a life of allegory", and his dramatic work was a "commentary" on it; and in the Sonnets (as Wordsworth said) Shakespeare "unlocked his heart".<sup>22</sup> While such a superstructure is no doubt edifying, one also has the uneasy feeling that it might after all be a house of cards, for the Sonnets — which were for the most part verse-letters sent (or only written) from time to time — are too weak a prop to support so impressive an edifice of philosophical interpretation in terms of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. But there are valuable insights in Wilson Knight's interpretation for which the student of the *Sonnets* should be duly grateful.

Were the *Sonnets* in the 1609 Quarto really by different authors, although T.T. attributed them all to Shakespeare? One detective has discovered no less than 7 such authors. Did the Earl of Pembroke engage Shakespeare to write some of the sonnets on his behalf to be addressed to *his* dark woman, Lady Rich? Did Southampton ask Shakespeare to write on *his* behalf? Were some of them written by Elizabeth Vernon to Southampton? Much ingenuity has been expended by scholars to identify the several authors of the *Sonnets* — to rearrange and distribute the 154 pieces — and to hunt for acrostics by reading some of the Sonnets upside down or diagonally. All which is exceedingly interesting, but once we dispute the authenticity of T.T.'s ascription or even his arrangement, chaos must come again.

Were the *Sonnets* a conscious parody of the sonneteering tradition, just as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* was a satire on the whole chivalric tradition of the middle ages? But even as the intended satire became itself a masterpiece, immortalising the Knight of La Mancha as a figure of fun indeed but also as a hero and a saint in his own right, so also Shakespeare's *Sonnets*

<sup>20</sup> *The Mutual Flame* (1955), p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 141-2.

transcended its original intention and gave a new dimension and significance to the *genre* itself. As D. G. Rees has pointed out in a recent essay,

"By taking as the two poles of his experience the 'man right faire' and the 'woman colour'd ill', Shakespeare, in that poetic form which was most closely bound to convention, utterly disrupted all conventionally patterned presentations of experience ... The flat surface becomes three-dimensional and new relations and associations appear ... Shakespeare's sonnets invalidate the convention simply by sublime disregard of its dimensions, the imposition of an infinitely vaster view".<sup>23</sup>

That the *Sonnets* were a mere 'parody' of the tradition is thus only a fraction of the truth; the real truth of the matter is that Shakespeare found a brick and turned it into marble, he seized a ramshackle conventional mould but charged it with new incandescent purpose.

Could the *Sonnets* be described as note-book jottings in verse — as Hamlet did: "My tables — meet it is I set it down" (I. v. 107) — that were meant to be subsequently elaborated in the poems and dramas? The correspondences between *Venus* and 1-17 have been noticed by all. One of the sonnets, 26 is the verse form of the prose dedication in *Venus*. The fair but unreliable aristocratic friend appears as Proteus in *Verona* or Hal in *Henry IV*; the dark woman is Gertrude who succumbs to the adulterate beast, Claudius; there are other dark women too in the plays, Rosaline in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Hermia in *A Dream*, and Phoebe in *As You Like It*. It is possible, of course, to give free reins to one's fancy after the manner of a Frank Harris and identify the proto-typical figures of the *Sonnets* in the heroes and the dark women ('dark' either literally or only metaphorically) in the various plays, but this would be merely surrendering to an *idée fixe*. To see echoes or correspondences is one thing, to deny an independent artistic existence to the *Sonnets* is a very different thing altogether. It is more rewarding to read the *Sonnets* as a unique poetic testament while also recognising in them, as L. C. Knights has done, "certain marked premonitions of later development", these being "a keen and pervasive love of life, . . . an equally keen, equally pervasive feeling for the stealthy and unimpeded undermining by Time

<sup>23</sup> *Elizabethan Poetry* (Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 2), pp. 66-7.

of what the heart holds most dear. . . . And finally, allied with a capacity for self-searching and moral discrimination, there is a groping for some certitude to set over against the perpetual flux of things . . ."<sup>24</sup> — a certitude whose name is Love, the Love that somehow defies the tyranny of Time.

By a process of elimination, we come to the last possibility: Were the *Sonnets* really what they seem to be — what Coleridge thought they were — "Shakespeare's own feelings in his own person"? The simplest explanation is sometimes also the best. If the Folio of 1623 contained "his owne writings", the 1609 Quarto edition of the *Sonnets* contained "his own feelings in his own person". In short, the *Sonnets* give us the 'essential' Shakespeare! But even after reaching this conclusion, we have to rid our minds of needless prepossessions and meaningless cant. Like Johnson who was drawn to Chesterfield first, Shakespeare was also drawn to a young nobleman (almost certainly the Earl of Southampton). Shakespeare also felt a fateful attraction for a dark-haired dark-eyed woman who exerted a magic sensual spell on him for some years. She was apparently a married woman but with Messalina's propensities, and although he couldn't respect her, neither could he resist her charms. Being already a husband and a father, Shakespeare both writhed under the slavery and was helpless to escape from it. The hope that the friendship of the aristocratic friend would more than counter-balance the shame of the other slavery was shattered when he was seen to be as much a slave of the senses, and as fickle and almost as heartless, as the woman herself. It was disillusion all round, but it was also an education in the hard way. Shakespeare learned to live with his misery, and in time to transcend it. He tried to build the memory of the fair days of unclouded friendship into a higher reality, an absolute defying Time and Death and Reason. All this wrestling with his own heart, his own emotions and passions, certainly stood Shakespeare in good stead when he came to write his plays of light and his plays of darkness — and the final plays in which he 'beyonded' darkness to greet another Dawn.

Since the above paragraphs were written, and while the book was in the press, A. L. Rowse's and Peter Quennell's biographies,

<sup>24</sup> *Some Shakespearean Themes* (1959), p. 50.

Seymour-Smith's edition, and Dover Wilson's Introduction have appeared, and the old controversies have been revived with redoubled fury. All discussion tends to be vitiated because the identifications depend on the dating, and *vice versa*; it is the spectacle of the cat chasing the tail, and the tail the cat. Hotson dates the Sonnets too early, Dover Wilson too late; the dating range is thus 1585-1605. To cite an extreme case, there is G. W. Phillips who argues (*Sunlight on Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 1935) that the Sonnets were composed over a period of 21 years (1583-1604), that Lord Oxford was their real author, that the 'lovely boy' and 'Will' of the Sonnets was Oxford's illegitimate son, William, and that this William had a liaison with the second Lady Oxford! Critics (with the best intentions, of course) start tentatively with either the dates or the identifications, and then look for—and generally find—corroboration in the Sonnets themselves. Where the received 'order' (Thorpe's) of the Sonnets doesn't support the hypothesis, alterations in the order—sometimes drastic—are proposed; and, the phrasing being knotted, ambiguous or obscure in many places, lines and words could be interpreted in a way that chimes with the theory.

Of the two chief contenders for identification as the Friend and Patron, the partisans of Southampton (Henry Wriothesley) and of Pembroke (William Herbert) seem now to be pretty evenly matched, though even now the balance of evidence seems slightly to tilt towards the former. But it is not as though there is absolute unanimity in either camp. Murry is for Southampton, and so are Rowse and Seymour-Smith, but their understanding of the emotional drama of the *Sonnets* differs widely; both Tyler and Chambers, as also Dover Wilson (once an ardent Southamptonite), are for Pembroke, but Dover Wilson, in what is the fullest recent discussion of the problem, dates the Sonnets some years later than 1595, the initial date suggested by Chambers. Rowse and the Southamptonites rightly insist that Southampton was Shakespeare's only known patron, but Wilson and the Pembrokeans argue that the First Folio was dedicated to Pembroke and his brother. The "Mr. W.H." conundrum doesn't really fit either Noble Lord, nor for that matter Sir William Harvey. The 'rival poet' was Marlowe, affirms Rowse; Robert Gittings makes out a laborious case for Gervase Markham (in *Shakespeare's Rival*, 1960); and Dover Wilson (following Minto and Acheson)

opts for Chapman. As regards the Dark Lady, Rowse simply says: "In fact we do not know, and are never likely to know, who she was" (*William Shakespeare*, p. 197). Dover Wilson feels it couldn't be Mary Fitton (who is known to have had an affair with Pembroke); although unidentifiable, the Dark Lady must have been "a married woman . . . no common courtesan" (*Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 1963, p. 41).

Since there is thus sharp disagreement still about the dating of the *Sonnets*, their order, and the identification of friend, rival and lady, even the simple sense of the sonnet-sequence remains something of a puzzle. It is, of course, all right to say (as C. S. Lewis does) that the *Sonnets* are the supreme love-poetry of the world: that "in certain senses of the word 'love', Shakespeare is not so much our best as our only love poet" (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 1954, p. 504). But in what senses? In his later book, *The Four Loves* (1960), Lewis speaks of 'affection', 'friendship', 'eros' and 'charity' as the 'four loves'. All these, of course, figure in the *Sonnets*. Talking of 'eros', in Shakespeare's experience did it include what Northrop Frye calls "pederastic infatuations"? When Shakespeare wrote (144) —

Yet this I ne'er know, but live in doubt,  
Till my bad angel fire my good one out —

what did he mean? Did he refer to the possibility of the Dark Woman communicating venereal disease to the Friend, as Seymour-Smith explains the passage, or does it mean merely dismissing the Friend, as Dover Wilson seems to imply (*Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 39)? Admitting that 'love' is the theme of the *Sonnets*, is it presented in terms of shame, frustration, horror, helplessness and self-laceration, or in terms of affection, exhilaration, fulfilment, gratitude, and generosity? There is ample evidence for either view, and so the *Sonnets* remain a tantalising crystal in which we seem to be able to see what we want to see.

So much talking about and about the *Sonnets* leads us at last to the 'heart of the matter' — the sheer miracle of their poetry, the marvel of the marriage between the inner tension and the outer rhythmic expression; but there, at the very threshold, our motion is arrested, and we needs must stop. The two instruments that Shakespeare took over from his predecessors — blank

verse and the sonnet-form — could in inexperienced hands have quickly degenerated into media for undisciplined doodling and mechanical formulation respectively. It proved otherwise with Shakespeare, for, as Derek Traversi has pointed out, “the linguistic discipline imposed by the sonnet form upon his natural Elizabethan exuberance was a decisive factor in the formation of the poet’s mastery of expression”.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the wide-ranging Elizabethan sensibility (to which Shakespeare was a privileged heir) and his own personal exultations and torments of passion could by their interactions have made a lesser poet either the purveyor of familiar sentiment or the monopolist of a private morbidity surging from sinister depths of feeling. It was the measure of Shakespeare’s genius as a magician-craftsman in verse and his greatness as a man that he could bring about a double cross-fertilisation, between the freedom of blank verse and the discipline of the sonnet on the one hand and between the reigning Elizabethan sensibility and his own unique individuality on the other. When the bulk of the Sonnets had been indited and Shakespeare had triumphantly lived down his shames and regrets, there emerged in Shakespeare’s mature dramatic writing the double marriage — between elasticity and compression, and between universality and uniqueness — which holds the clue to his greatness as a poet and dramatic artist. There are passages — or whole sonnets — that one could read without reference to their biographical or schematic context and salute as the revelation of an ancient wisdom, as the *ne plus ultra* of poetic expression :

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end ... (60)

The summer’s flow’r is to the summer sweet  
Though to itself it only live and die;  
But if that flow’r with base infection meet,  
The basest weed outbraves his dignity ... (94)

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove.  
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;

<sup>25</sup> *An Approach to Shakespeare* (2nd Edition, 1957), p. 53.

It is the star to every wand'ring bark,  
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
 And bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
 If this be error, and upon me prov'd,  
 I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd. (116)

These are sparks from the anvil of the experience of those terrible years, and in such passages — or even in single lines like "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought" or "Like to the lark at break of day arising" or "And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair" — poetry becomes an absolute, like Love, or Truth, or Beauty, for such poetry is all these in "concordant one".

## V

## THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE

It is a truism now to say that one of the recurrent notes — perhaps the great Bass — of the *Sonnets* is the tyranny of Time. All things pass and change. Every day has its ending, every bloom its fading and its fall. Sonnet 65 articulates with stern urgency this most fundamental of questions:

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,  
 But sad mortality o'ersways their power,  
 How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,  
 Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

There is the hint of an answer in 124, for true Love is beyond accident, decay or death:

It fears not Policy, that heretic,  
 Which works on leases of short-number'd hours,  
 But all alone stands hugely politic,  
 That it nor grows with heat nor drowns with show'rs.

There is a kind of death that is akin to new life, for one almost wills to die to be able to give new life. This truth has to be apprehended, not rationally, but mystically, and Shakespeare has made an attempt to convey this 'mystical tremendum' in his



amazingly short and compacted poem, *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, which appeared in 1601 in the volume *Loves Martyr*.

A poem of only 67 lines, *The Phoenix and the Turtle* is made up of 13 stanzas of 4 lines each, followed by 5 of 3 lines each. "Is it not fitting", I. A. Richards asks, "that the greatest English poet should have written the most mysterious poem in English?"<sup>26</sup> It is only in our own times that this little poem has attracted serious critical attention and comment. Ranjee Shahani in his rather pioneering study, *Towards the Stars* (1931), probed into the metaphysical implications of the poem, though he also argued that, not Shakespeare, but Fletcher was its author. A more recent exhaustive study is Wilson Knight's *The Mutual Flame* (1955) in which are elaborated ideas first put forward in his earlier book, *The Shakespearean Tempest* (Appendix A, vi). Still more recent is I. A. Richards's illuminating talk on the poem. Richards quotes Emerson as saying that the poem "would appear to be a lament on the death of a poet, and of his poetic mistress". Alexander calls the poem "a metaphysical treatment of the theme of love and constancy".<sup>27</sup> Masfield thinks that "the dark and noble verse seems to describe a spiritual marriage suddenly ended by death. . . Verse of such beauty and glory, thought of such tenderness of praise can only be the work of Shakespeare".<sup>28</sup> It is like a diamond in this: it dazzles whichever way we turn it. Is it but a witty poem, packed with conceits? Is it symbolistic, with whole chains of equivalence for the two birds? Is it but pure quintessential poetry—poets' poetry? Is it mysticism doubled with metaphysics, vision with revelation? Is it a summing up or an anticipation of Shakespeare's major plays, a stanza for each: the first for *Romeo and Juliet*, the second for *Macbeth*, the third for *Cymbeline*, the fourth for *The Merchant of Venice*, the fifth for *Hamlet*, the sixth for *Antony and Cleopatra*, and so on? Does the poem commemorate the fact of the union *here* of Truth and Beauty, constancy and love, the ideal and the real,—or does the poem rather insinuate the fact that, not *here*, but only in death (in the 'mutual flame'), only on the *other* bank, can the Turtle and the Phoenix (or Antony and Cleopatra:

<sup>26</sup> *American Critical Essays* (XX Century), edited by Harold Beaver, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 97.

<sup>28</sup> *William Shakespeare*, p. 21.

Othello and Desdemona : Romeo and Juliet) achieve stainless felicity ? Or must we say, with Robert Ellrodt, that Shakespeare is not celebrating true lovers and their blissful death, but dreaming "of Love and Constancy, Truth and Beauty, straining after the highest intensity, in which lies 'the excellence of every art' (Keats) " ?<sup>20</sup> We feel bewildered, but also fascinated, for the core of the poem is covered by veil upon veil : the 'threnos' is encased in the 'anthem', which is sung at the time of the 'obsequy', which follows love's holocaust ; the poem verily teases us out of thought as does Eternity !

Quite obviously, the birds 'phoenix' and 'turtle' are symbols as well as birds. The Phoenix is the mythical Arabian bird, the symbol of resurrection and immortality — the symbol of the divine Advent. There is only *one* Phoenix, growing and dying and at once being reborn, just as there is only *one* Sun, the setting Sun which is also the rising Sun. The Turtle is the Paphian dove of Venus, the full-grown Adonis. Thus the Phoenix and the Turtle are birds and myths at once — emanations of Prakriti and Purusha — and the joyous frenzy of their union is also the mutual flame of their immolation or extinction. There is a total exhaustion, a seeming death, — which are characteristic alike of sex union and creative artistic expression. Love without realisation, as in *Venus and Adonis*, is but discomfiture ; lust without love, as in *The Rape of Lucrece*, is even worse than death. In the *Sonnets*, Shakespeare veered between love without "the perfect ceremony of love's rite" (23) and the lust in action that was "the expense of spirit in a waste of shame" (129), and knew no infallible way out of his perplexity. He found it at last (was there a fresh efflorescence of understanding between him and Anne Hathaway, now newly brought together by the shared sorrow over their son Hamnet's death in August 1596 ?) in holy wedded love, and commemorated it in *The Phoenix and the Turtle*. The poem begins —

Let the bird of loudest lay  
On the sole Arabian tree,  
Herald sad and trumpet be,  
To whose sound chaste wings obey

<sup>20</sup> 'An Anatomy of *The Phoenix and the Turtle*' (*Shakespeare Survey* 15, p. 108).

Who is this 'bird of loudest lay'? Ranjee Shahani's suggestion is that it is the nightingale. Or is it the Peacock, as suggested by Osbert Sitwell? It is really the reborn Phoenix itself who summons the other birds to the obsequies of the departed Phoenix and her consort, the Turtle. In India, when a parent dies, it is the son who invites his blood-relations (*dāyādhis*) and other 'kith and kin' to the obsequies, to 'witness'—almost to participate in—the rites that culminate in the mystic union of the departed soul with the *pithris* ('manes'), and to bless that the 'line' may continue through the generations yet unborn. The dead live in the living, because the living are the fruit of holy wedded love. The son has become the father; the King is Dead. Long live the King! Death is defeated,—and, after the prescribed period of mourning, joy is invited back to the domestic hearth. Death too, even like marriage itself, is verily a sacrament, and hence not a bug to flee from but a fact of Nature to accept with unflinching faith.

To the newly risen Phoenix's call only 'chaste wings' respond. The owl ("Foul precurrer of the fiend") keeps away. The birds of prey—except King Eagle—also keep away. The "obsequy so striet" is no orgy or carnival but a ritual observance to reconcile the dead and the living in a new bond of love. The "priest in surplice white" is the swan, while the "treble-dated crow", embracing three human generations, is the link between the dead, the living and the yet unborn. (In the *śrāddha* ceremony in India, the remains of the ritual offering to the *pithris* are given only to the crow.) While many birds are present, only three (besides the Phoenix) are actually mentioned: the Guardian-Eagle, the Priestly-Swan, and the sable Crow comprising both fathers and children. When all are gathered.—

Here the anthem doth commence :  
Love and constancy is dead ;  
Phoenix and the Turtle fled  
In a mutual flame from hence.

So they lov'd as love in twain  
Had the essence but in one ;  
Two distincts, division none :  
Number there in love was slain.

True love had made the Phoenix and the Turtle *one* in reality, though two in appearance. The other assembled birds wonder

how such Love that defied division, distance, and space had at all been possible. Love that thus survives death, although it is in accordance with the 'law' of Love, is yet beyond our (or the other birds') everyday understanding. Wondering at this power of Love's transcendence, the assembled birds sing a 'threnos' in commemoration of the Phoenix and the Turtle, the "co-supremes and stars of love":

Beauty, truth, and rarity,  
Grace in all simplicity,  
Here enclos'd in cinders lie.  
  
Death is now the phoenix' nest;  
And the turtle's loyal breast  
To eternity doth rest.  
  
Leaving no posterity -  
'Twas not their infirmity.  
It was married chastity.

In his perceptive analysis of the poem, A. Alvarez shows how many approaches, how many disciplines, meet and merge in this total affirmation about holy wedded love:

"Metaphor, accurate perception, ambiguity, wordplay, in short, all the associative energies of Shakespeare's verse have rarefied into this abstract allusiveness, by which, as Donne often does, he feels towards the inner mystery of love. For this he builds up his own -- or love's own -- metaphysic. . . *It was married Chastite*. . . It is the only paradox in the Threnos, the only positive value, positively and unequivocally affirmed. . . The detail, the logic, the aesthetic distancing are all necessary steps to this final inner core of purity".<sup>30</sup>

At the one critical point in the poem (45), everyday understanding ('Reason') suddenly makes a leap across the Maya of the world, and glimpses another world, where our dualities have no meaning. Narrative poetry grows wings and hymns the language of prophecy or Revelation. But, presently, even this, after trafficking with words for a while, abandons the attempt as hopeless. The Revelation that the poem finally conveys is but a profound silence (the *shanti* of the Upanishads); the triad of verities — beauty, truth, rarity, *sundaram*, *satyam*, *sivam* — are lost in the ineffable Silence, the home-and-womb-of-all, the ultimate Mystery. The poem appropriately begins with a loud summons and ends with a silent prayer.

<sup>30</sup> *Interpretations*, edited by John Wain (1955), pp. 13-5.

## CHAPTER X

### ROMANTIC COMEDY

#### 1

#### HISTORY, TRAGEDY, COMEDY

Ever since Heminge and Condell grouped Shakespeare's 36 plays under Comedies, Histories and Tragedies in the Folio edition of 1623, superficial readers have been apt to assume that these terms are clear-cut, and were so understood in Elizabethan and Jacobean times. But plays were not so succinctly or categorically described in the Stationers' Register or on the title-pages of the Quarto editions. Under 2 May 1595, the SR refers to "a book intituled A pleasant Conceyted historie called 'the Tayminge of a Shrowe'", *Titus Andronicus* is entered on 6 February 1594 as "a booke intituled a Noble Roman Historyc of Tytus Andronicus". What we now call the Second Part of *Henry VI* is described in the SR as "a booke intituled, the firste parte of the Contenton of the twoo famous houses of York and Lancaster with the death of the good Duke Humfrey, etc." *Richard II* is entered as a "Tragedie", and *Richard III* as "The tragedie of kinge Richard the Third with the death of the Duke of Clarence". In the SR entry (22 July 1598) for *The Merchant of Venice*, the play is also described as "the Jewe of Venice". *Hamlet* is entered on 26 July 1602 as "A booke called 'the Revenge of Hamlett Prince of Denmarke'", while *King Lear* is described under the date 26 November 1607 as a 'historye'. It is clear therefore that Shakespeare and his contemporaries had less rigid ideas about history, tragedy, and comedy than a look at the 'Catalogue' prefixed to the First Folio would seem to warrant.

The terminology was so far from rigid that the Folio editors themselves, with little embarrassment, brought in *Cymbeline* at the tail-end of the Tragedies, and Bernard Shaw has been able to describe *Coriolanus* as Shakespeare's best comedy! It is certainly convenient to separate the 10 history plays, *King John* to *Henry VIII*, from the rest of the Canon, and read the two tetralogies as the 'tragedy' of England and of the English people, conveying a cumulative sense of horror, and suffering, and futility, but also of nobility, and humanity, and reawakening strength. If an epic could be defined as a significant evocation of events and characters that are of paramount interest to a particular nation but also of general interest to all mankind, then Shakespeare's history plays have certainly an epic intention and sweep. England's trials, her search for unity and stability through monarchic legitimacy and strength, her trying to learn, under the stress of experience, to reconcile in practical action the contradictory pulls of order and impulse, are the basic theme of the history plays. But since England's history is also human history, these plays make a profound human appeal as well.

In the Comedies and the Tragedies — as distinct from the Histories — the theme is seized from the human end. *Macbeth* belongs to the history of Scotland (Tillyard has a chapter on *Macbeth* in his *Shakespeare's History Plays*), *Lear* and *Cymbeline* to early British History; *Caesar*, *Brutus*, *Antony*, *Octavius*, *Coriolanus*, and *Titus Andronicus* are Roman historical characters, while *Timon* has some sort of niche in Athenian history. Perhaps, there was a Prince of Denmark corresponding to *Hamlet* and a Moorish General of the Athenian army named *Othello*. But from the beginning these characters are seized inwardly and presented imaginatively; they are not studies in national types of heroism but sparks of primordial humanity and creatures of infinity who have survived all changes in a last changing world. No doubt characters in fiction and drama, however the writer may have seized them inwardly, need to be clothed and given a set of habits before they are let loose among us. It is a question of the relative emphasis arising from the initial movement. In the English history plays, Shakespeare sought to present certain political situations and characters, and incidentally he also brought out what was of primary or universal human interest in them. The history plays are literature without question (always

the substantive is more important than the adjective), but literature reasonably subordinated to hard facts; the play of invention and imagination has but a restricted scope in such dramas. In the Comedies and the Tragedies, on the contrary, Shakespeare started with certain archetypal human situations, worked his way to the human core, and touched both character and plot with universality and imposed on them his individual vision of the human predicament on earth and what man may hope for. The creative writer is ruled by the categorical imperatives of his imagination more than by masses of facts, theories of 'Order' and 'Planes', or the minutiae of Ethics. Inspiration comes to him from divers sources: books, observation, personal involvement, intellectual excitement. But not till all this is processed by the solvent of the imagination can they crystallise into great art. We have necessarily to hunt for Shakespeare's 'sources', nose for autobiographical parallels (if any), try to relate elements in the play to his current predilections, idiosyncracies or preferences, but we have also to remember that, in the final valuation, the play is really the child of his imagination. The 'subject' has exhausted itself, and is dead; the dramatic artist too has exhausted himself in the act of creation, and is 'dead' for the time being. From the funeral pyre of the poetic consort and the poet, there has emerged the work of art, the 'child' of the poet's imagination. Each of the plays has thus been a creation, a birth; each of the plays is unique in its own right. Yet it is not altogether illegitimate for the critic to play the census-enumerator and number the plays, group them, and catalogue their common characteristics.

## II

### THE SUBSTANCE OF ROMANTIC COMEDY

In *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew* Shakespeare wrote farces, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* a play about Romantic lovers with a certain admixture of comedy, in *Love's Labour's Lost* a witty comedy trembling on the borderland of romance, and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a fantasy that seemed to laugh at love and lovers—both the married lovers in the play and the tragic lovers in the play within the play. There

is a hint of 'romantic love' in the mutual attraction between the Syracusan Antipholus and Luciana, Valentine and Sylvia, and Lucentio and Bianca, and in Julia's single-minded devotion to Proteus. Even in *A Dream*, although the love-juice makes Titania dote upon an ass, and makes asses of both Lysander and Demetrius, and cats of Helena and Hermia, it leaves the emotional attachment of these young ladies undisturbed: it is the men who are made to play quick-change artists in love. Nevertheless, 'romantic love' as an absolute—the ideal forcefully presented in Sonnet 116 ("Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds") and in *The Phoenix and the Turtle*:

Single nature's double name  
Neither two nor one was called --

has so far figured nowhere except in *Romeo and Juliet*; and there, as they lie buried in the Capulets' tomb, the young lovers too may inspire (like the birds) this 'threné' to the 'co-supremes and stars of love':

To this urn let those repair  
That are either true or fair;  
For these dead birds sigh a prayer.

How was Shakespeare to project in Comedy this vision of 'romantic love'? Even when the other birds see with their own eyes the miracle of the Phoenix and the Turtle—"two distincts, division none"—even though for a split-second they leap across Reason and see that "Love hath reason", still when they come to the point of commemorating the death of "the turtle and his queen", the 'threnos' becomes more or less conventional. How are the Capulets and Montagues to *believe* that anything other than the stark double-tragedy could possibly be the truth: that beyond the vault of "the phoenix's nest and the turtle's loyal breast" there could possibly exist another life, or the same life immaculately extended, in defiance of our notions of time, property, division, distance, and death? The blazing Sun of Truth is too blinding to be seen directly. It has to be veiled, it has to be seen through the intervening atmosphere, the mist, the passing clouds,—and seen with shaded, averted eyes.

The one truth, the one faith, the one belief worth communicating is the truth of death's transcendence by the human spirit.



Death, do thou die ! Death, thou art dead ! This can be done only if the reality of a power higher than Death — a power that is also a function of the spirit of man, of the human personality — can be successfully, convincingly, projected before our consciousness. Love — Love that is the trinity of 'Beauty, truth, and rarity' — could be that power. It is the Sun that dispels the darkness of Death. But this Sun has to be veiled, it has to be seen through the circumambient air, the fog and the mist and the smog, and even through the massed floating clouds, — and even beyond a sudden total eclipse. Hence Shakespeare felt the need to present 'romantic love', not in splendid isolation, but along with much else that seemed to obscure its lucent splendour. Thus 'romantic love', which is an Absolute, is made to co-exist with other kinds of love — the relativities, ambiguities, perversions, and even the negations of love ; and with varieties of 'hate' as well. Does this make a comedy in which 'romantic love' figures too 'broad', too comprehensive, for the forging of dramatic unity ? Broadness or width by itself need be no defect, for, as George Gordon rightly asks : "What is wrong with width ? 'The world *is* wide, and its width supplies a kind of profundity in another dimension' ".<sup>1</sup> As for dramatic unity, be the frame as broad as it may, be it loaded with as varied an assortment of objects as may be desired, if the fulcrum is centred strongly enough, there need be no upsetting of the balance. And so long as the Sun shines, things *are* illuminated — however numerous they may be, however obscure.

In a tragedy like *Romeo and Juliet*, the projection of the transcendent power of Love is viewed as a 'mere wonder'. The Light had been too soon put out, and the love has to be inferred from the death, the light from the darkness. The wonder is conceded but not quite credited, it is extolled but not accepted as a living faith. In the mature Tragedies, the darkness is all that there seems to be ; the light, when it trickles through, comes as a pale reflected light, or something very remote like the stars, mere pins of light. The Tragedies are about apparent death ; and yet it is the tragedian's role to convince us that death — even when it tauntingly confronts us — is not the end. Death is somehow defeated by some other power. This power is not Love — that union of 'Beauty, truth, and rarity' — except, perhaps, in *Othello*,

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespearian Comedy*, p. 34.

and perhaps also *Antony and Cleopatra*; but though it is not this trinitarian splendour, what helps to defeat death is at least a speck, an emanation, of this power. It is some 'value' or spiritual measure that outbids death's dread measure: any positive value would do — courage, integrity, innocence, endurance — even if it were mixed up with much that is dross or worse. Thus Tragedy too *affirms* through apparent negation; it posits 'life' through the presentation of 'death'; and it is the tragedian's vision and the power of his poetry to communicate it that make the 'lie' of this paradox the higher 'truth' of Tragedy. But we shall return to the Tragedies later.

There is no statement of the 'substance' of Shakespearian Comedy (Romantic Comedy, that is) as brilliant and as apparently final as Bradley's on Shakespearian Tragedy. Yet, as early as 22 March 1912, Mark Hunter made a gallant attempt which seems to have been almost wholly ignored by Shakespearian scholars.<sup>2</sup> Although others — for example, Marc Parrott, George Gordon, H. B. Charlton, Sen Gupta, John Russell Brown — have since tried to extract the 'essence' (some while also deprecating all such attempts), none has achieved the bold clarity, the almost Bradleyan comprehension, of Mark Hunter. It may, of course, be argued that this clarity, if it is a merit, is also a superficial and even a deceptive merit when a phenomenon so complex, so elusive and ethereal as 'Romantic Comedy' is in question. While there is some point in this animadversion, still it should not deter us from taking a general view of Shakespeare's Romantic comedies, not as anything rigid, but as a preliminary to a more detailed study of the individual plays.

What is the 'world' of Romantic Comedy? The Elizabethan audience was taken to Venice (and Belmont), to Messina, to the Forest of Arden, to Illyria. It is a far country, rendered strange, alluring, and unpredictable by the fact of distance in space and time. "The advantage of the Romantic preference for remote-

<sup>2</sup> This address on 'The Substance of Shakespearian Comedy' was originally delivered before the South Indian Branch of the English Association at Madras and published as a booklet, and has since been reprinted in the *Madras Presidency College Magazine* (February 1939). Notable among recent studies are E. M. W. Tillyard's *The Nature of Comedy and Shakespeare* (1958), C. L. Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959), Bertrand Evans's *Shakespeare's Comedies* (1960), Sitansu Maitra's *Shakespeare's Comic Idea* (1960), John Vyvyan's *Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty* (1961), and Mary Lascelles's *Shakespeare's Comic Insight* (1962).

ness in time and space", says Marks Hunter, "is obvious", and adds :

"Remoteness weakens or completely removes the impression of improbability; for of course Romance, though depending for its effect on the improbable, does not aim at conveying an impression of improbability, but rather seeks to invest the strange and wonderful with an air of likelihood."

We are prepared for anything that might happen, and many strange things do happen. After all, — well, this is not a picture of life happening in the next street, or that happened but yesterday. *There* — some hundreds of years ago, perhaps — there in far-off Messina or unheard-of Illyria, in the inaccessible Forest of Arden or in enchanting Belmont under the moon — *there*, perhaps, such things did take place, and such persons did live. But, of course, on closer scrutiny, this Messina — this Venice — was not much odder than "*London—A Street—Enter two citizens*". Launcelot, Dogberry, and Malvolio were no different from their English counterparts. Silvius and Phoebe were no strangers to the English countryside, nor was Arden itself. Even 'Illyria' was by no means an impossible address in Elizabethan England. The spell of strangeness was thus followed by the pleasant shock of recognition, and it was the privilege of the dramatist to cast the one as well as administer the other. As Gordon finely puts it, "it is in his power over these two worlds, in his ostensible alternations between Nowhere and England, that Shakespeare's romantic comedies excel all others".<sup>3</sup>

Even as the story is located in a seemingly strange and far-away place, the 'action' too is invested with a patent improbability with regard, not so much to the minutiae which flow naturally enough, but to the central situation itself. Consider, for example, the bond-story in *The Merchant of Venice*. How incredible on the face of it the story is! In Moulton's words —

"That such a bond should be proposed, that when proposed it should be accepted, that it should be seriously entertained by a court of justice, that if entertained at all it should be upset by so frivolous a pretext as the omission of reference to the shedding of blood: these form a series of impossible circumstances that any dramatist might despair of presenting with even an approach to naturalness".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Shakespearian Comedy*, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (1885), p. 61.

Shakespeare does what he can. He sees to it that the improbability is (in Hunter's words) "a Romantic, not a farcical, improbability"; not an improbability arising from mere comic exaggeration of character, namely caricature, or from comic exaggeration of incident through a series of unlikely coincidences. Thus characters like Petruchio and Armado, the Antipholuses, and the lovers in *A Dream* are normally kept out of Romantic comedy. Romantic improbability is simply the improbability of the dream, the ideal, the exceptional, the picturesque — the improbability of what is to us inaccessible though greatly desirable. Yet, in a Romantic comedy, this ideal possibility is mixed up with varying ingredients that are other than romantic. Tragedy is kept out, and history is kept out. A Romantic comedy may, indeed, perilously edge towards Tragedy (as in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing*) yet not actually touch it. History with its excessive addiction to fact wouldn't mix either with the seeming incredibilities of Romance. The lash of satire or open didactic exhortation too might destroy the illusion of Romance. On the other hand, when they are in a minor key and mingle purposefully with the many notes in the symphony, they too can co-exist with Romantic comedy.

In such a place, in such an atmosphere, Love is the central light, the infallible intelligence, the chief source of life and happiness. And this Love is identified primarily with a young woman. She is the *shakti* of this universe; she is beauty, truth, and rarity, and inspires similar virtues (or values) in her lover. In a Romantic comedy, the main stress is on the story of these lovers, — a story, says Mark Hunter, "treated seriously, moving through a number of checks and trying complications to a prosperous ending". It is, besides, "a story not only of high life, but of the highest in each particular case possible". But, allied to the main story, there are invariably other stories also, but — like silken threads of divers colours — all are cunningly woven into a single texture:

"Through complexity of plot is secured a compensating variety, both variety of character-interest, and variety of delight afforded by the alternation of two or more Romantic themes, together with a greater or lesser admixture of pure Comedy not Romantic".

In this world, love sometimes rages like an epidemic; in *The Merchant of Venice* there are three marriages at the end of the

play, in *Much Ado* there are two, in *As You Like It* there are four and in *Twelfth Night* three. "In this climate of romance", says Gordon, "it is, of course, the rule that all the lovers shall love at once, and love absolutely. Nothing else, in this world, is to be permitted".<sup>5</sup> But this is no homogeneous or monistic world; while the lovers are sighing or singing, just round the corner in a tavern or even downstairs in the buttery there are care-free creatures swearing by cakes and ale. Shakespeare *would* make these two antagonistic worlds co-exist somehow; the dualism of the worlds of Romance and Comedy is exceeded by a *visishtadvaita* of dramatic artistry. In Gordon's words again,

"Shakespeare proceeded, as he always does, by compromise. If Comedy laughs, Romance is not to be offended; if Love sighs, Comedy promises to put up with it—to a point! to a point! . . . The law, therefore, is one of decency and measure. The solemnity of Love is relieved by the generosity of Laughter, and the irresponsibility of Laughter by the seriousness of Love".<sup>6</sup>

The comic scenes provide contrast and relief to the Romantic scenes, and this itself is an advantage. But they have another role too, namely to create a climate of realism in which the Romantic improbability also may be accepted without question. Further, once we concede the validity of the improbable situation (as we needs must, with a suspension of disbelief), the chain-reactions that flow from it seem to be reasonable enough. The Romantic characters—Portia and Bassanio, Beatrice and Benedick, Rosalind and Orlando, Viola and Orsino—may be caught in an exceptional situation, but their behaviour in these contexts is nevertheless touched with verisimilitude. These heroes and heroines—placed in situations that are abnormal and almost impossible (though not recognised by them as such)—still act reasonably enough and convincingly enough, and this Mark Hunter calls "the higher realism". The actions of a Portia, a Beatrice, a Rosalind, a Viola—three of them adopt male disguise and the fourth strikes us at first as a mere spitfire—are impossible, we say; yet in the end we admire them and even believe in their reality. It is the art of Shakespeare that creates the illusion that what is, perhaps, impossible in the eyes of common-

<sup>5</sup> *Shakespearean Comedy*, p. 48.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49.

sense can none the less be acclaimed as the higher probability, the veracity of the world of Romance. Since, for the time being, it is the imagination that lays down the law, we are not only content, we also ask for nothing better.

In this strange world, peopled by divers sorts of men and women who are engaged in activities that range from the heavens of Romantic love to the familiar earths of folly and futility, on this stage where these actors participate in a complex drama determined by the obscure forces of character and action, one is happily left in no doubt regarding the ethical seriousness of the plotting of the action and the delinquency of the characters. Shakespeare is unambiguously on the side of the angels, but even so he wouldn't too readily consign the fools and the knaves to the relevant slopes of Purgatory or the circles in Hell. To quote Mark Hunter once more,

"The men and women in Shakespeare's comedies are of varying degrees of moral worth and worthlessness, and from none, it may be truly said, is some measure of sympathy withheld; but the characters for whom most sympathy is demanded are, on the moral ground, essentially noble, even balanced and proportioned types".

The world of the Shakespearian Romantic comedy is thus a gay and happy world, and also essentially a 'moral' world. And the synoptic centre of this world, its Savitar, is the Romantic heroine who incarnates the power and glory of Love. She has "Beauty, truth, and rarity./Grace in all simplicity". We may momentarily be diverted more by the antics of a Launcelot Gobbo, the masterful stupidity of a Dogberry, or the love-sick attitudinisations of a Malvolio. We may find Sir Toby good company for a while. We may watch the pertness of Phoebe with amusement. But we return to the Sun, nor are we at any time far from that Power and Glory. The Shakespearian Romantic heroine is that rare creature, her mind, heart and soul in splendorous harmony. In these heroines, as H. B. Charlton says in his *Shakespearian Comedy*,

"hand and heart and brain are fused in a vital and practicable union, each contributing to the other, no one of them permanently pressing demands to the detriment of the other, yet each asserting itself periodically to exercise its vitality, even if the immediate effect be a temporary disturbance of equilibrium, for not otherwise will they be potent to exercise their proper function when the whole of their owner's spiritual nature is struck into activity".

A heroine like Rosalind has graduated from the school of adversity, and the lesson she has learnt is that, even in life's darkest extremities, she shouldn't forget the claims of love and sacrifice, nor lose the innate joy of living. In the hands of women like Portia, Beatrice, Viola and of course Rosalind, the frivolous comedy of the ancients recedes and its place taken by a transmuted 'divine comedy' which effectively links "the kindred points of heaven and home". The heroine, she only, she alone, is the whole incarnation of the idea of the Shakespearian Romantic Comedy. Ruskin probably had this in mind when he said that Shakespeare has no heroes but only heroines.

Far away and long ago : a situation of Romantic improbability: Romantic characters in action exemplifying the law of impossible probability : a love story plotted with ethical seriousness and ending happily : a heroine who is the mind, heart and soul of the play, its laughter, its love, and its infallible wisdom — these are the 'elements' that mix to make the 'substance' of Shakespearian Romantic Comedy.

### III

#### THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Writing of his association with *The Merchant of Venice*, Quiller-Couch says : "I first came to it as a schoolboy"; even in India, most students of Shakespeare might make a similar confession. But in India, few would chime with him when he adds presently : "Although I got it by heart I could not love the play".<sup>7</sup> In Asiatic countries, *The Merchant of Venice* is of Shakespeare's plays one of the most popular (if not the most), Shylock being identified however unreasonably with the pet local aversions. For example, in pre-war Siam (so I learnt from a diplomat who knew the place) the play was exceedingly popular, Shylock being of course identified with the typical Chinese exploiter. In an Assamese blank verse adaptation of the play (*Bonji Konwar*), Omeokumar (Antonio) represents the Assamese while Chandanmal (Shylock) represents the exploiter from out-

<sup>7</sup> *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, p. 70.

side who is hated both on linguistic and cultural grounds. The greedy heartless money-lender is a familiar figure in India. To borrow Shylock's trick of speech, there are city-rats and country-rats, country-wolves and city-wolves, and interest can nibble away and gobble up one's wages, one's property, and all one's wife's jewels as well. Without any serious critical evaluation of the play, young and old have been ready to read it as the story of the usurious dragon put down by an angel of justice and mercy. And this impression is the more general because as students most have read only the Trial Scene (an inevitable anthology piece and a favourite with Boards of Studies), or the story comes to the overwhelming majority of readers in a prose vernacular adaptation which invariably polarises the pseudo-legal duel between Shylock and Portia.

When one looks at the play more closely, one is struck by features that are rather unconventional. The Jew is supposed to be a usurer, greedy for profit, greedy for gold; yet the whole point about his present transaction is that it is not profit or gold that he wants but a fellow human being's 'flesh'—in other words, his life. Shylock is willing, and indeed breathlessly eager, to lose his 3000 ducats; he is not willing to take three times the sum for parting with it only for three months, though this would have given him 800 per cent interest besides the principal; what he wants is one pound of Antonio's flesh "nearest his heart". This is not usury, though Shylock might also be a usurer. What name shall we give to this? What is the real issue between Shylock and Antonio? Is it racial antagonism between Jew and Gentile? Is it the hatred of the mere money-lender for the merchant with far-flung interests? The fact of the hatred is unmistakable, and it is also clear that it is largely an one-sided affair. While Shylock hates Antonio, the latter's feeling is more one of contempt than hatred towards Shylock—which perhaps only infuriates Shylock all the more. In his first 'aside', Shylock says (I. iii. 37):

I hate him for he is a Christian;  
But more for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis, and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.



He hates our sacred nation ; and he rails,  
 Even there where merchants most do congregate,  
 On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,  
 Which he calls interest. Cursed be my tribe  
 If I forgive him.

Like Iago, Shylock too is detailing far too many reasons for hating his enemy, which makes us doubt whether the 'ancient' grudge isn't something that is beyond location or definition. Later, faced with the overwhelming fact of Shylock's implacable hatred, Antonio can offer only this explanation (III. iii. 24) :

He seeks my life ; his reason well I know :  
 I oft deliver'd from his forfeitures  
 Many that have at times made moan to me ;  
 Therefore he hates me.

Shylock is on a first view a somewhat 'comic' figure : an 'alien' with his strange ways and his hoarded wealth, the shabby man with a load of grievance, the bad man who is upto anything. His reticences and silences, his repetitions and reiterations ("Ho, no, no, no, no"; "I thank God, I thank God"; "I am very glad of it... I am glad of it"; "Let him look to his bond... let him look to his bond... let him look to his bond", all within 4 lines, III. i. 40) are characteristic of him, and so are his gesticulations and volubility. His 'merry sport'—3000 ducats in 3 months' time, or a pound of Antonio's flesh—is casually acquiesced in by the debtor. The three months pass. While Bassanio, on whose behalf Antonio has borrowed the money, wins Portia the heiress of Belmont, here in Venice the bond is forfeit and Shylock demands his 'pound of flesh'. To the general hatred of Antonio and the Christians is now added a new motive for revenge : the Christian, Lorenzo, has eloped with Shylock's daughter, Jessica, and all her jewels are gone too. All the accumulated wrongs of the man and of the race, real or imagined, are now to be revenged on Antonio. In the celebrated 'Trial Scene', Shylock's mind works with fiendish excitement ; he is like a maniac driven by the nervous frenzy of accumulated hatred, and all his thoughts are centred in Antonio's death. Of what use is a pound of a man's flesh, asks Salerio ; and Shylock answers (III. i. 45) :

To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgrac'd me and hind'ed me half a million; laugh'd at my losses, mock'd at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies. And what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes . .

and so on. It is more like improvisation, the motive-hunting of a rooted malignity, than a rational attempt to justify his conduct. The semi-comic figure of the early scenes has become a colossus of evil, and Antonio and his friends and well-wishers are powerless in the face of Shylock's diabolic obduracy. It is at this juncture that Portia appears as the young lawyer from Padua, and makes her classic plea for mercy. But the Jew presents an adamant front to all appeals to his humanity. He exceeds his role as the traditional usurer and asks for the 'pound of flesh' alone, and will not accept the ducats augmented many times over. What is the matter with him? The fact is he has become suddenly, as a result of the forfeited bond, a vast boil on the body politic. Portia has no option but to use the surgeon's knife (not the avenger's knife, which the Jew had ready carefully sharpened!), and Shylock awakes from the nightmare in which he has gloried as Omnipotence to the crude realities of everyday life in Venice. Shylock had boasted (III. i. 60): "The villainy you teach me I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction". Nemesis now overtakes him; it is measure for measure. Once the boil has burst and Shylock has been forced back to civil normalcy, he merely collapses; the rest is anti-climax for him. There is much in the judicial procedure in the 'Trial Scene' that may raise a laugh in the modern reader; this is, however, neatly balanced by the fantastic procedure followed at Belmont for choosing Portia's bridegroom. There is a truth in Romantic comedy that exceeds the merely legal, formal, or conventional truth; it is the 'higher realism' of Romance, myth and poetry, and it satisfies the soul even when it gives a jolt to the mind. Whatever the impediments, the guerdon is won, the evil is overcome; Bassanio has won his lady, and Antonio has won back his life. Where the mind is free and without blemish, the impulse to love has (this is the religion of Romantic love) enough potency to checkmate all adverse circumstances and all sinister operations of evil. Antonio hasn't loved Bassanio in vain, nor has Bassanio loved Portia in vain. In this reading of the play,

*The Merchant of Venice* is a joyous affirmation of faith in the efficacy of love and friendship, and a demonstration of the ultimate futility of evil.

Of course, Shakespeare took the bond story from his 'source' or 'sources'. Although the reference in Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* (1579) to a play called *The Jew* produced at the Bull "representing the greedinesse of worldly chusers and bloody mindes of usurers" seems to indicate a plot like that of *The Merchant of Venice*, since the play itself hasn't survived it is difficult to say for certain what exactly the play was about. This applies also to two other plays of the time, *The Venesyon Comodyc*, and Thomas Dekker's *The Jew of Venice*, neither of which has escaped oblivion. But both the elements of the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* are found in the Italian story *Il Pecorone* by Fiorentino, which was probably Shakespeare's principal source. Shylock, Antonio, Bassanio and Portia have their counterparts in the Italian original. Fiorentino's Jew lends to the merchant Ansaldo 10,000 ducats, to be repaid on St. John's Day, failing which he would forfeit a pound of his flesh. With this money Ansaldo's son, Giannetto, marries the Lady of Belmonte, a rich and rather unscrupulous widow. When the bond docs become forfeit, the Jew rejects the offer of even ten times the borrowed sum, and when the Lady of Belmonte in the guise of a lawyer tells him that he should not shed any blood he tears up the bond and Ansaldo is free. The ring episode too is in *Il Pecorone*. Shakespeare took over the Jew bodily almost (but adding a few psychological touches), but transformed the Widow of Belmonte into the wonderful Portia of the play. Bassanio is the merchant's friend, not son. In the original, the merchant ends by making an incongruous marriage with the Lady's maid, but Shakespeare leaves Antonio in his chronic, if splendid, bachelorhood, and creates bumptious noisy Gratiano to marry the maid, Nerissa, and incidentally doubles the Ring episode. Besides this story, Bullough has printed in his *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (Vol. I) several other possible sources or analogues also: for the caskets plot, *Gesta Romanorum*, LXVI; for the Jessica story, Anthony Munday's *Zelauto*, as also Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*; and for the trial itself, Alexander Silvayn's *The Orator*. It is almost certain that the hanging in June 1594 of the Queen's physician, Lopez the Jew, after a

sensational trial gave Shakespeare (or his Company) the idea of capitalising the popular sentiment against the Jews. It is also possible that the play was commissioned by Southampton, on behalf of the Earl of Essex who had denounced Lope in the first instance.

Granted that Shakespeare lifted the main story from *Il Pecorone* and wished to make the play ostensibly an anti-Jew tract, once the 'elements' came to be handled by him, they fused into a shape different from the original intention and became significant in an entirely different way. The Indian poet, Sri Aurobindo, who wrote a few blank verse plays in the manner of Shakespeare has put into the mouth of one of his characters (Antonio in the unfinished play, *The Maid in the Mill*) this defence of the practice of refurbishing old material :

He's creator  
Who greatly handles great material,  
Calls order out of the abundant deep . . .

In Shakespeare's handling of the theme, the centre of interest shifts from the Jew to the Lady ; it is now not simply the report of an averted crime but essentially the story of a great love. In the original, the Lady comes in to prevent the possible 'murder' (for that is what it would have come to) of Ansaldo by the Jew ; in Shakespeare's play, the Jew comes in (shall we say ?) to bring out the full splendour of Portia. It is a decisive shift in emphasis — a shift, in fact, from a 'crime club' story to a Romantic comedy. Of the two foci of interest with which we start — Belmont and Venice — Shakespeare makes it increasingly clear that Belmont is the real centre. Till Act IV, the action seems to oscillate between Belmont and Venice. Because Bassanio loves the Lady of Belmont and would win her, he applies for a loan to his Venetian friend, Antonio, who executes the bond to the Jew. Fortified with the money and guided by his heart Bassanio proceeds to Belmont, wins the Battle of the Caskets, and wins the Lady too. When the caskets have served their purpose and may as well be sent to the Belmont Museum, — when all is over bar the ringing of the marriage bells, — the bond, almost forgotten, suddenly leaps into life. Portia has just 'accepted' Bassanio with a particularly beautiful yet maidenly speech (III. ii. 149) :

You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,  
 Such as I am. Though for myself alone  
 I would not be ambitious in my wish  
 To wish myself much better, yet for you  
 I would be trebled twenty times myself,  
 A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich,  
 That only to stand high in your account  
 I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,  
 Exceed amount . . .

When she learns of Antonio's plight, when she reads his letter, she is almost a new woman, "trebled twenty times" herself. This love of Antonio for Bassanio is like a revelation to her. She sees Bassanio with new eyes, for he has evidently deserved the love (Greater love hath no man . . .) of such a man as Antonio. She sends Bassanio to Venice, and follows him herself, though unknown to him. Love and gratitude grow wings in her, quicken the agility of her intelligence, and she neatly turns the scales in the Trial Scene. This sort of thing cannot happen, we say; that is true, and the more is the pity. But, then, there are no such people as Portia. The bond story has served to throw a luminous light on Bassanio and Portia: Bassanio is the sort of man who could inspire such love in Antonio, and Portia's love and gratitude are of the kind that can defeat the diabolic moves of even such a man as Shylock. Although both Antonio and Shylock are 'merchants', while one makes money the means to the higher life (including friendship and love), the other is either content to make money itself the end or uses money (as in the story) to wreck his vengeance on his enemy. John Russell Brown has drawn a legitimate inference from this:

" . . . Shakespeare saw love as a kind of usury, and so in their marriage Bassanio and Portia put Nature's bounty to its proper 'use'. Shylock practises a usury for the sake of gain and is prepared to enforce his rights; the lovers practise their usury without compulsion, for the joy of giving . . . The comparison of the two usuries is part of a more general comparison of commerce and love which is likewise maintained throughout the play".<sup>8</sup>

The two principal actors in the bond story, Shylock and Antonio, have served their purpose, and one by one they too — though in different ways — retire, and leave the foreground to Bassanio and

<sup>8</sup> *Shakespeare and His Comedies*, pp. 64-5.

Portia. Theirs is the felicity of love, theirs is the glory of love's consummation in marriage.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the situation in the *Sonnets* is idealised and imposed on the *Il Pecorone* story. Bassanio has two 'loves', the good angel who is the unfailing friend and the other —

And she is fair and, fairer than that word,  
Of wondrous virtues... nothing undervalu'd  
To Cato's daughter... her sunny locks  
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece (I.i. 162) —

even a better angel to them both. There is no indifference on one side, no falsity on the other. Was Shakespeare presenting an ideal Romantic situation — nevertheless a situation that, in the way he presented it, carried its own justification and imaginative validity? The 'father' in the Italian story is now the benevolent friend, the scheming widow has become the Lady Portia of "wondrous virtues"; and these changes are deliberate and purposive. The Nerissa-Gratiano parallel story is on a definitely lower key, while the Jessica-Lorenzo story has for its aim the further linking up of Venice and Belmont. There is indeed a regular exodus from Venice the city of commerce to Belmont the city of arbours and moonlight and music, and even Launcelot Gobbo has left Shylock's service and come to Belmont in Bassanio's equipage.

Two doubts arise: since Bassanio is a sufficient link between the bond story and the caskets story, where is the need for the additional link-story of Jessica? Again, once the Jew is defeated and Antonio's life is saved, what is the point in introducing the episode of the rings? Probably the Abigail story in *The Jew of Malta* gave Shakespeare a hint. Further, it is as a father that we should have expected to find some human touches in Shylock, and once she too forsakes him ("Our house is hell" is her summing-up of her life with her father: II. iii. 2), he is isolated indeed except for his scolding spite and sleepless hate. The fact that Shylock's money will go after his death to Jessica is meant to mollify him a little when he comes to review the Trial at leisure. And in the joyous reunion at Belmont, although Shylock is absent, his daughter at least is present, and we are expected to see that she is not quite the heartless girl who has run away

with her father's money with her young man ; rather has she been scared away by his petty inhumanity and Himalayan malignity.<sup>9</sup> As for the Rings episode, the germs of it are in the original story, of course, but if Shakespeare hadn't found a dramatic use for it, he would have excised it without compunction. Actually he doubled its importance. The obvious reason is that it is all welcome romantic fooling. The more important reason, however, is that after the frayed tempers and dead seriousness of the Trial Scene, the Jessica-Lorenzo musical stylisation and the contrived fooling on account of the rings are the effective means of bringing the drama from the lacerations and violences of the court room to the lucent extravagances of the land of romance. The play is a Romantic comedy, not the Tragedy of Shylock. When Bassanio chooses the right casket (III. ii. 114), we have reached the turning-point in the plot ; but his victory sets a new problem, which Portia solves for him, for her judgement in IV. i. 300ff is her way of cutting the Gordian knot. The rest is the normalcy of Romance — music, wit, innocent fooling, laughter, love — and so the last Act that elaborates the Rings motif is nothing superfluous to the broad scheme of the play. While Raleigh thinks that the last Act, although it is "an exquisite piece of romantic comedy... is a welcome distraction, not a full solution"<sup>10</sup>, John Russell Brown is more to the point when he writes :

"Music had been heard earlier at the crucial moment of Bassanio's choice of caskets and now the opening dialogue of the fifth act between Jessica and Lorenzo likens Belmont's music to that of spheres... behind worldly affairs there is harmony in the heavens... If the right, reverently harmonious music plays at the end of the comedy, it may awaken the audience's responses behind the immediate dialogue ; and with its image of divine harmony may be blended a perception of the lovers' underlying confidence and Antonio's loneliness, and a memory of pity and terror aroused by Shylock, who had called the music of his enemies a 'shallow foppery'. Thus the fifth act can suggest a deep perspective... in its vast dimensions there is scope for a recollection of the fullest realisation of Shylock".<sup>11</sup>

If we continued to think that Shylock is 'too huge' for the role allotted to him in the play, we should certainly grumble ; but that is not really the position. Shylock is of alien race and reli-

<sup>9</sup> Cf. III. ii. 286-92.

<sup>10</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> *Early Shakespeare*, pp. 208-9.

gion ; he is furtive and suspicious ; he is venomous and spiteful ; he has a strange and awful power of speech, like the Ancient Mariner ; he sometimes creates the illusion that he is more than himself — that he is the representative Jew, heir to a million indignities and persecutions, taking revenge on Antonio the representative Gentile, the fawning publican, the sanctimonious Christian — and it is when he talks in this role that he seems to rise to his greatest heights, as in the "Hath not a Jew eyes" speech in III. i. Was Shakespeare trying to have it both ways : making Shylock the fiend of the original story and also the 'tragic' figure over whom his enemies score such a "cheap un-Christian" victory ? Actually, as we have seen, Shylock's vindictiveness is something personal, a tumour of his tortured brain that multiplies real and imaginary wrongs. Always, just when he is about to reach a heroic stature, he says or does something terribly mean or petty (for example, he complains that Launcelot is "a huge feeder, snail-slow in profit"), or gives out a hiss or a snarl, that suddenly deflates him and cuts him to his proper size. The comprehensive vision of *The Merchant of Venice* includes both Venice and Belmont, and also shows the agreeable translation from the hucksterings of the Rialto in Venice to the orchestrated harmony in Portia's garden at Belmont. Many notes are blended in the harmony, but Shylock has no place there ; but although he is left out, he is not forgotten. For a 'happy' ending, this is as far as the dramatist could go, and his artistic conscience has guided him aright.

## IV

*MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING*

Shylock at least has catalogued his grievances with some show of conviction or even passion (III. i. 445), but what is Don John's 'grievance in *Much Ado About Nothing* ? Shylock is an 'alien', Don John (like Aaron in *Titus* and Edmund in *Lear*) is a 'bastard' ; Richard is misshapen, Iago and Iachimo are Italian fiends, and Claudius is a satyr — "a mildew's ear". Evil evidently struck Shakespeare as a perversion of Nature, a deviation from normality. Don John himself is like a snake with a forked tongue that shows its fangs for a second, then hurriedly with-



draws into the thicket or the ant-hill from which it had come. He confesses to being a man of few words, though of a morose temper. His jealousy of Claudio *may* be one reason for his actions : " That young start-up has all the glory of my overthrow. If I can cross him in any way, I bless myself every way " (I.iii.57). It is possible he hates his brother, Don Pedro, for much the same reason Edmund hates Edgar in *Lear*. But surely Hero has in no way harmed him, and his villainy is directed mainly against her. So we can only say that though, like Iago or even like Shylock, he too can trot out reasons, the real urge in him is the irresistible desire to encompass evil, to plume up his will (as Iago says) in " double knavery ". The exercise of villainy is the enjoyment of a sense of power. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia plays Providence and prevents the actual commission of the intended crime of the ritual killing of Antonio. In *Much Ado*, the functions of Providence are shared evenly by the radiant faith of Beatrice and the transcendental stupidity of Dogberry.

*Much Ado* is a symmetrically plotted play. In I. i the principal characters gather, and while we witness the first skirmish of wit between Benedick and Beatrice, we also see that Claudio has fallen for Hero. Don Pedro would be the go-between and get her to agree. In I. ii we see what misunderstandings could arise from eavesdropping. In I. iii Don John is seen with his two collaborators in evil-doing ; he would, he says, feed his ill-humour by crossing Claudio's path. While one brother plans to promote the Hero-Claudio marriage, the other plans to wreck it. In II. i, not only Hero has been won for Claudio, but there are also plans to promote another marriage — between the incompatible Benedick and Beatrice. In II. ii Don John and Borachio start the counter-movement. In II. iii and III. i, by means of carefully contrived eavesdropping by Benedick and Beatrice respectively, each is made to think kindly of the other, overcoming their earlier pronounced mutual antipathy. Just when the second marriage is in the fair way of materialising, Don John carries out his plan to wreck the foundations of the proposed first marriage (III. ii). In III. iii, Dogberry and Verges and the Watch arrest Borachio and Conrade while they are seconding Don John's plan. Next morning, on the day fixed for Hero's wedding, her father Leonato misses the opportunity to foil the plot when he practically ignores Dogberry's formal complaint (III. v. 42) :

One word, sir : our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two aspiring persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

Of course, Leonato is in "great haste", and so he directs Dogberry to conduct the examination himself ; still his remissness has serious consequences.

Act IV, Scene i, is on the face of it—and certainly to the principal actors—a dramatic reversal of the movement of the action. Hero is shamed in the church, and falls down in a swoon. It is a revolting exhibition of male callousness, recalling in a way the outrage on Droupadi in Dhritarashtra's Durbar Hall as described in the *Mahabharata*. The darkness of ignorance, real no less than spiritual,—and ignorance of whatever kind is but a form of evil,—blinds all the characters : all except Beatrice. *She* is aglow with fire, and *she* is the sole source of light, life and hope, at least for the time being. In her alone is now incarnated the promise of reviving sanity. "Kill Claudio !" is no doubt the culminating atomic explosion—"it is the outbreak", says Stopford Brooke, "of a thousand sorrows, feelings, wraths, tears, agonies of indignation, which have surged and collected with Beatrice since Claudio denounced her cousin"<sup>12</sup>—but the real Beatrice is revealed no less in her spontaneous earlier remark, "O, on my soul, my cousin is belied" ! Her flame of living faith converts the Friar, revives Hero, and transforms Benedick from the mere chatterer to the Knight in shining armour fighting against falsehood and injustice. At the crucial moment when Hero is disgraced by her lover and disowned by her father, Beatrice alone has the sense of the unclouded truth and the courage of absolute conviction to strike a fierce blow on behalf of her injured cousin. Thus she alone infuses Hero with the will to live and fight calumny, instead of succumbing at once to the impact of public slander. "Kill Claudio" *nails* the play, says Quiller-Couch, and indeed the words come with a thunderclap, throwing into insignificance all other speeches in the play, her own not excluded. Love, anger, passion, righteous fury and revenge all blaze and fuse together; and Beatrice and Benedick are united on top of the world, on Everest ; that moment of time passed, there is no other go except to gravitate to the plains of the ludicrous. After

<sup>12</sup> *Ten More Plays of Shakespeare* (1932). pp. 26-7.

Beatrice's flaming anger, — well, Dogberry's incandescent absurdity (IV. ii. 69) :

Dost thou not suspect my place ? Dost thou not suspect my years ?  
O that he were here to write me down an ass !

And *both* Beatrice and Dogberry are engaged on the same task : the righting of a wrong, the recovery of the lost herds of Truth. Verily the sublime and the ridiculous are separated but by a thin partition ! It is the characteristic 'mark' of Shakespeare's dramatic art that, in creating Dogberry and his associates, he has not only given English realism full play (recalling Bottom's own sublimities) but also found just the right men for the double job on hand, namely fulfilling the claims of justice while at the same time fulfilling the needs of the comedy. As John Palmer writes in his *Comic Characters of Shakespeare* (1946),

"Dogberry has to be sharp enough to discover there is a conspiracy against Hero *before* it is executed, so that the audience may know in advance that all will come right in the end. But he must also be stupid enough to prevent his discovery from taking effect till the conspiracy has served its turn. The character of Dogberry... corresponds exactly with the necessities of the action... Shakespeare's craft as a playwright successfully conceals the fact that Dogberry was expressly designed to forward — or perhaps we should say retard — the action of the play".

Dogberry and the Watch muddle their passage through to the exposure of Don John and his tool Borachio. In V. i, we have the anti-climaxes — Leonato, Antonio, Benedick challenging Claudio one after another, but the confessions of Conrade and Borachio render the duels quite unnecessary. Hero's name has been cleared, and the heaviness departs. Had she been a character in a Dostoevsky novel — say, a woman like Nastasia Filipovna — she might not have cared to be reunited with the wretched Claudio. But she is a good sweet creature, as innocent as she is forgiving, and she is willing to make allowances for human stupidity, and she is relieved that the nightmarish misunderstanding is over. Claudio's trespasses are forgotten, and Hero marries him on the same day that Beatrice marries Benedick. As for Don John, nobody bothers about the 'brave punishments' that are to be designed for him. We are well rid of him now, and that is enough.

Literary sleuths have been after the 'sources' of *Much Ado About Nothing* and Charles T. Prouty's book (1950) on the subject is an exhaustive report that leaves Shakespeare's sheer originality in handling his sources where it was, and will always be. Bandello's tale of Timbreo and Fenicia has the Hero-Claudio plot in its essentials. But their marriage is sought to be wrecked by a rival, who is also a friend, by name Gironde. The illusion of Fenicia's faithlessness is created at night by a few muffled words and a man going up a ladder. As given in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, however, the rival, the false Duke, deceives the lover by making another woman, Dalinda (the analogue to Shakespeare's Margaret), play the part of the lady, Genevra. In Bandello, the criminal is a friend who thinks he is genuinely in love with the lady; in Ariosto, the rival is a Duke who feels he has been slighted by the lady's preference for a mere Knight. The 'villains' have in either case some 'motive' for their actions, but Shakespeare has substituted in their place Don John the bastard, an obscure force of pure evil. It is causeless enmity that most intrigues us, for against it (since we cannot possibly anticipate it) we cannot raise any defences. It is true Don John is but shown, and is presently withdrawn; but we do not like to remember that sullen sinister toad-like face. We know Shakespeare will better (or rather worsen) Don John in the grimmer setting of *Othello* in the person of 'honest' Iago.

The creation of Beatrice and Benedick, of course, is the major achievement of *Much Ado*. There is a friend (who is also a rival) in Bandello, but Benedick is a different order of creation altogether. And Beatrice is entirely Shakespeare's own. Just as, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare has made the Romantic story of Bassanio and Portia the main thing, and even the bond story only subsidiary to it (thus reversing the relative emphasis in *Il Pecorone*), here in *Much Ado* too Shakespeare has made the Benedick-Beatrice story the main psychological action, and the Claudio-Hero plot (for all its excitement) merely subsidiary to the other. Dover Wilson has argued in the *New Shakespeare* edition of the play that there had been an earlier play (also Shakespeare's) of which the present play is a revision,—the revision pertaining largely to the Benedick-Beatrice scenes, changing a play that might have been a variation of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* into this fireworks display between Benedick and

Beatrice. Although Dover Wilson's view is not generally accepted, one thing is pretty obvious in the present version: the Claudio-Hero story only serves to highlight the Benedick-Beatrice story. The main plot is really about the complicated dynamics that force Benedick and Beatrice to recognise their love for each other. When they meet first in the play, they seem instinctively to fly at each other (I. i. 99):

I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick; nobody marks you.

What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

By a trick, each is made to feel that the other is madly in love, and that it is their duty to reciprocate the love, lest the other die. There is a revolution in their psychology, and they needs must sing new tunes. Thus Benedick (II. iii. 200):

This can be no trick . . . Love me! Why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censur'd: they say I will bear myself proudly if I perceive the love come from her; they say, too, that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry. I must not seem proud . . .

And Beatrice, when her turn comes, actually breaks into verse (III. i. 107):

What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?  
Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?  
Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride, adieu!  
And, Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,  
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand . . .

In the church scene, there is the wholly altered situation of these two being in love while the other two — Hero and Claudio — have the seven oceans suddenly yawning between them. Even so, an artificially fabricated emotional situation is no firm basis to build love upon. The outrage on Hero becomes a trial by fire to all of them, though it is only Beatrice and Benedick that "emerge pure gold out of the setting".<sup>13</sup> They have awakened into love, really and truly. Of course this love couldn't have blossomed if the seeds weren't already there. Rossiter has explained that Benedick and Beatrice do not exactly *hate* each other

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21.

even at the beginning : "the opposite to love (as passionate, obsessive interest) is not hate (another passionate interest), but cool or unnoticing indifference".<sup>14</sup> It is not indifference, it is not hate ; each is constantly thinking of the other, neither can leave the other alone ! Many roads lead to the goal of Romantic love, and apparently the road pursued by Benedick and Beatrice is one of them. At any rate, they are not lifeless people, nor listless humourless people ; they are *alive*, and whenever they meet the sparks fly, and while hoping to wound each other they enjoy each other's discomfiture, and this constant tension between them becomes almost a bond between them, and as they strain at it they are exasperated as well as thrilled. In the end they manage to look into each other's heart — and that is how they recognise the mutual reflection of their loves. During the voyage of the discovery of the mutuality of their love, they pass the Hell of stimulated antagonism and the Purgatory of shared anger at Claudio's behaviour, and career at last towards the very gates of the paradise of Romantic love. Perhaps, the most comprehensive summing-up of Beatrice is that attempted by Ellen Terry who had played Beatrice hundreds of times :

"I must make Beatrice more *flushing* at first, and *softer* afterwards. She must be always *merry* and by turns scornful, tormenting, vexed, self-communing, absent, melting, teasing, brilliant, indignant, *sad-merry*, thoughtful, withering, gentle, humorous, and gay. Gay, *Gay* ! Protecting (to Hero), motherly, very intellectual — a gallant creature and complete in mind and feature".<sup>15</sup>

This really is Shakespeare's Beatrice, and it is she — Woman as the blessed eternal Feminine, Woman as *Shakti* — that keeps the world of *Much Ado* bright even when the sky lours and darkness is about to invade and conquer.

Wonders, however, do not cease in *Much Ado*. Besides Beatrice there is one more darling of Shakespeare's imagination, Dogberry. The region where Dogberry and Verges move about is the realistic 'low-comedy' level, but who cares ? "It shall be suffigance". Dogberry is an ass, and he is particular he should be written down an ass, but he has on the whole done a neater job than the Prince of Arragon or the Governor of Messina. So

<sup>14</sup> *Angel with Horns*, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Gordon's *Shakespearian Comedy*, p. 57.

strangely balanced is this world of Romantic comedy that, for its sanity and safety, two such sovereign powers as Beatrice and Dogberry are badly needed ; one gives it light, the other provides the ballast, and so when the hurlyburly is done and the errors are somehow remedied, we feel like dismissing it all airily as *Much ado about nothing* ! But that will be wrong too, for the play really ranges over almost the entire gamut of human experience — from pure villainy to pure love, from poetry to bawdy, from tears to laughter, from the dancing lights of the intelligence to the quickened throbs of the heart, from the deceptive shadows of Appearance to the white radiance of Reality.

## V

## AS YOU LIKE IT

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the gravitational pull was from the Rialto and the 'usury of money' towards the garden in front of Portia's house and the 'usury of love'; in *Much Ado*, the transference was from the many levels of Appearance — misprison, false report, deception including self-deception, where prejudice and ill-will run riot — to the plane of Reality where Love understands everything and forgives everything. Likewise, in *As You Like It*, we witness a similar drift, from the Court to the Forest of Arden. It is true the Rialto cannot be wholly excluded from human affairs ; it is true appearances cannot be wholly done away with. The diet of love — though it is manna and honeydew — yet needs the other items on the menu (a clear head, commonsense, compassion, humour and the gift of laughter) to make life full and viable and purposive. This Portia knows, and Beatrice knows. Portia in the Trial Scene and Beatrice in the Church Scene have come in contact with the hard core of malignity in certain human hearts, and they are not likely to forget this experience. Shakespearian Romantic comedy is not 'soft' ; it is not simple entertainment ; we are hardly ever quite removed — or far away — from the attentions of evil or the taste of tears. It is almost by a hair's breadth that *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado* are 'saved' from becoming tragedies.

Even in the world of the comedies — as in the world of the

histories and of the tragedies — evil is prowling about in one form or another, exercising greater or lesser malignancy. Comedy has its system of insulation, but insulation is not elimination or destruction. Besides, the insulation itself may suddenly break down! What are the different ways in which the impulse to do evil and the measures to insulate its operations could be presented in poetic drama? The intention to commit a crime is not the same thing as actually committing it, though the very intention taints the soul. First, as in some of the Romantic comedies, we may have a situation in which an intended criminal act is prevented in time; or circumstances intervene that render impossible the accomplishment of the crime. As there is no actual crime, there is no irresistible call for punishment either. If, as in *As You Like It*, the erring brothers repent, the incident is treated as closed. Shylock himself, although there is no hint of repentance, is treated leniently enough. *Second*, an intended crime or injury may be prevented no doubt, but the means employed to achieve this end seem somewhat dubious or leave an unpleasant odour behind. Again there is no paramount call for punishment, and to brood on the horror that might have happened rather than accept with gratitude the reassuring actuality is not the way of wisdom. This is the dramatic situation in the so-called Problem Comedies, *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. *Third*, a crime may both be intended and accomplished: what then? The normal — almost universal reaction — is revenge or reprisal, a process of action that may embrace, not merely the criminal, but also his friends, his relatives, — not even innocent women and children being excepted. Unescapably such revenge or reprisal starts a series of alternating currents, crime being followed by punishment (which is but another and perhaps worse crime), and in its turn provoking a third crime, and so on, crime and punishment becoming interchangeable or jumbled categories, and society becoming a determined mutual suicide club. This is the recurring situation in the tragedies from *Titus Andronicus* onwards. Is there no other way? If men's minds don't flirt with sin and crime, or if the intended crimes are luckily prevented by chance or design, there is either no problem or the problem of punishment is fairly easy of solution. But crimes are not only planned, but are sometimes actually committed. The human family hasn't still outgrown the primitive stage of Cain answering



unabashed, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Cains continue to liquidate Abels: what then? We have seen that the way of reprisal or revenge leads but to the bleak equality of the grave. Is there no other way in which the challenge of evil can be met? 'Resist not evil'! Is it a council of perfection? Is it a vocation only for Messiahs and Mahatmas? Cannot crime be met by forgiving, instead of by reprisal or punishment? A crime is planned and committed, but the criminal is forgiven! This is the *fourth* possible way of dealing with the problem of evil and crime, and Shakespeare has dramatised this approach too in some of his plays—notably the so-called Romances of the 'last period'.

We have seen how in both *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado* the intended crime (or disturbance of the moral order) is averted or detected in time, in the former because of Portia's advocacy and in the latter by the accident of the Watch stumbling upon the truth (although not at once realising its importance). The harsh notes cease before they are able to destroy the rich music of the Romantic comedy. *As You Like It* is an even gayer comedy, the romantic strain is even richer. Here too there are attempts at crime or violent dislocation of the moral order, but the moves are foiled one way or another; and there are sudden conversions that help to bring the situation back to normalcy. We are meant to shudder a little, then shrug our shoulders, and remember only the gaiety, wisdom and humanity of the whole show. The deformed Cains are themselves reformed men, and the Abels are restored to their own.

Shakespeare's 'source' for *As You Like It* was without question Lodge's prose romance, *Rosalynde: Euphues Golden Legacie*. Lodge himself built his romance on *The Tale Gamelyn*, once erroneously attributed to Chaucer. Of the 3 sons of Sir Johan of Boundys, the eldest hates the youngest (Gamelyn) because to the latter had been bequeathed the bulk of their father's property. There is a good deal of duplicity and violence—including a wrestling match—but Gamelyn receives timely help from Adam the Speneer (or Steward), becomes (like Valentine in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) the leader of the outlaws, and ultimately wrecks his vengeance on his cruel brother and releases from captivity the good second brother Sir Ote. In Lodge's ampler but more human version, the father (Sir John

of Bordeaux) has 3 sons again, Saladyne, Fernandyne, and Rosader (who become in the play Oliver, Jaques and Orlando, the father's name being likewise changed to Sir Rowland de Boys). The reason for Saladyne's hatred of Rosader is the same as in the *Tale*. Besides the enmity between the eldest and youngest sons of Sir John, Lodge introduces the usurper King and the banished King, and their daughters Alinda and Rosalynde. When the girls leave for the forest on account of the usurper Torismond's attitude towards Rosalynde, Alinda becomes Aliena and Rosalynde becomes Aliena's 'page', Ganymede. In the forest, Rosader saves his brother from a lion, and the brothers are reconciled. Later, when the brothers rescue Aliena and Ganymede from certain ruffians who set upon them, Saladyne and Aliena are naturally brought close together:

"Aliena after she had breathed a while and was come to her selfe from this feare, lookt about her... cast her eye upon this courteous champion that had made so hote a rescue, and that with such affection, that shee began to measure everie part of him with favour, and in her selfe to commend his personage and his vertue, holding him for a resolute man, that durst assaile such a troupe of unbridled villaines... Saladyne hearing this Shepherdesse speake so wisely began more narrowly to pree into her perfection... Love that lurked in all these broiles to have a blowe or two, seeing the parties at the gaze, encountered them both with such a venue, that the stroke pierst to the heart so deepe... At last after he had looked so long till Aliena waxt red..."<sup>16</sup>

Thus a specific situation has been created to render plausible Aliena and Saladyne falling in love, even as Rosader's wrestling match had been the occasion for Rosalynde falling in love with him and inspiring love in him. Lodge mentions also the shepherds Montanus and Corydon and the shepherdess, Phoebe. After the 3 marriages (Saladyne, Alinda; Rosader, Rosalynde; and Montanus, Phoebe) take place, the second son of Sir John comes to announce that the usurper is approaching to give fight to the rightful King. "To be short", says Lodge, "the Peeres were conquerors, Torismonds armie put to flight, & himselfe slaine in battaile. The Peeres then gathered themselves together, and saluting their king, conducted him royallie into Paris, where he was received with great joy of all the citizens".<sup>17</sup> All the main actors get their full deserts, and joy is the word for everybody.

<sup>16</sup> *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. Vol. II, pp. 222-3.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 256.

Adam the faithful steward is in all three versions, and the wrestler too figures in them all. Shakespeare deflates the Kings into Dukes, but makes them brothers, thereby sharply underlining the unnaturalness of the usurper's action. The 3 brothers also figure in all the versions, but the ostensible reason—that the father had left the youngest the largest share in the patrimony—is not used by Shakespeare to explain Oliver's hatred of Orlando. Actually, Orlando is left with "a poor thousand crowns"; and Oliver himself can offer no reasons for his hatred (I. i. 145) :

... my soul, yet I know not why, hates nothing more than he. Yet he's gentle; never school'd and yet learned; full of noble device; of all sorts enchantingly beloved; and, indeed, so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether misprised.

This might be Iago talking of Cassio : He wears a daily beauty in his life that makes *mine* ugly ! As with Shylock and Don John (and Iago), it is once again a nameless causeless hatred. The changes Shakespeare made in Lodge's story are thus significant : the Cains are presented more than ever Cain-like, inspiring the emotions of terror *and* pity. It has been pointed out that the presence of two such Cains and two such Abels has the effect of dramatic accentuation through purposeful variation (as in the more sombre *King Lear* for example), anticipating the two sets of brothers in *The Tempest*. On the other hand, Shakespeare does his best to tone down the violence and the cruelty. Duke Frederick gives Rosalind 10 days to make herself scarce, and he gives one whole year to Oliver to secure Orlando. Even the snake and the lioness wait patiently for the sleeping Oliver to wake up, and when Orlando arrives upon the scene by accident the snake quietly unlinks itself and slinks back into the bush while the lioness continues to wait all the time Orlando moves back and forth debating within himself whether he should intervene or not, and is submissive enough to get killed (though not before tearing a piece of flesh from his arm). The tempo of villainy in the play is subdued on the whole, even as life in the Forest of Arden is reasonably unhurried and serene. Apart from changing several of the names (Rosader=Orlando, Alinda=Celia, Montanus=Silvius, Torismond=Frederick, Corydon=Corin), Shakespeare adds a few more characters also : Le Beau (perhaps the

immediate predecessor of Osric in *Hamlet*), Jacques the 'philosopher', Touchstone the Clown, the shepherdess Audrey whom Touchstone weds and William whom she diseards. There is the self-exiled courtier, Amiens, to whom is assigned the well-known song, *Under the greenwood tree*. Shakespeare has on his hands four pairs to marry (as against Lodge's three), and the usurper is not killed in battle (as in Lodge) but experiences a sudden conversion as a result of "meeting with an old religious man". It is possible, as argued by Bullough, that Shakespeare was also indebted to the anonymous play, *Syr Clyomon and Clamydes*, in which a princess takes service in man's apparel under an elderly shepherd, Corin.<sup>18</sup>

Even in Lodge, the Rosalynde story has a shapeliness of its own, and hence Shakespeare took over from it as much as he could. Lodge himself owed a good deal to Lyly, as the subtitle *Euphues Golden Legacie* shows, and Shakespeare was ready to take all — story, sentiment, atmosphere, even the language. But, then, nothing passed through Shakespeare's hands but underwent a transformation. When he altered the story, he did so with a purpose: to emphasise the evil the more, making it more of a mystery; and also straining our credulity in the matter of the sudden reformation of Oliver and the usurper Frederiek. Oliver hated without reason, and when he changed, it was a total change, and hence Aliena *could* love this man — no need therefore to introduce the episode of his helping in the rescue of Aliena and Ganymede from the ruffians. Likewise, there is no cause to feel surprised that Frederiek is 'converted' after some question with an old religious man. If bad impulses that come as if from nowhere are permissible in drama, why should we deny the validity of equally mysterious good impulses? It was with a sure sense of the proprieties in the spiritual world that Shakespeare stresses both — making criminal impulses motiveless and inhuman and the subsequent reformation spontaneous and complete. The answer to the evil in this world is the Providence of God that expresses itself in the sudden surge of good impulses when the prospect seems to be least promising. And neither evil nor good is exactly amenable to the weights and measures of the market place. On the spiritual plane, then, *As You Like It* affirms the ultimate primacy of Good, of Love, of the claims of humanity.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 155, and pp. 257ff.

as against the unpredictable invasion of Evil, of Hatred, of sheer inhumanity.

Spatially, the movement in the play is from the Court to the Forest of Arden, — and (the last scene) the promise of a return to the Court. We are here concerned, not so much with particular individuals in the drama, but with contrasted attitudes to life and ways of living. Doubtless the Court is set up against life in the Forest: luxury, sophistication, formality, hypocrisy, double-dealing, as against bareness, simplicity, spontaneity, frankness, fair-dealing. This contrast is sharply polarised at first. The wrestler Charles gives his hearsay evidence (I. i. 107) that the exiled Duke and the self-exiled lords live "like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world". The exiled Duke himself philosophises over the situation in terms of contentment (II. i. 12):

Sweet are the uses of adversity;  
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;  
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.  
I would not change it.

But gradually Shakespeare introduces other notes, which cause a jumbling of the categories. To a question from Corin whether he likes the life of a shepherd, Touchstone answers (III. ii. 13):

Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect it is a shepherd's life, it is nought. In respect that it is solitary, I like it well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach.

And Corin the man of simple commonsense brings out the relativity of court and country manners (III. ii. 41):

Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behaviour of the country is most mockable at the court.

Forest life has its graces and compensations, but it has its dangers too; there are snakes and lions, for example. Life is hard, people

get exhausted even before they reach Arden from the city. Nature too can be as callous as man. Nevertheless, on balance, there is a good deal to be said in favour of the simple life of the shepherds. But even Thoreau left his retreat in Walden after only two years there, and returned to civilisation the richer for the stay in the woods. So the Duke and the other exiles — except the incorrigible Jacques! — are glad to return to the Court. They've had a renewal, a baptism of rebirth in the country. In Helen Gardner's words,

"As, when the short midsummer night is over, the lovers emerge from the wood, in their right minds and correctly paired, and return to the palace of Theseus: and, when Prospero's magic has worked the cure, the enchanted island is left to Caliban and Ariel, and its human visitors return to Naples and Milan; so the time of holiday comes to an end in Arden... Arden is a place of discovery where the truth becomes clear and where each man finds himself and his true way".<sup>10</sup>

The Duke and the lords and ladies of the Court are happy to return to civilisation, but now properly sobered and humanised by the experience in the woods.

Another ideal that is under scrutiny and attack in the play is Romantic love. How perverse this Love is! Phoebe repulses Silvius and loses her heart to Ganymede. Oliver suddenly inspires love in Aliena. Orlando doesn't recognise Rosalind in Ganymede. Is all love mere folly? Phoebe rebukes Silvius' ideas on love (III. v. 10):

Thou tell'st me there is murder in mine eye.  
Tis pretty, sure, and very probable,  
That eyes, that are the fraill'st and softest things,  
Who shut their coward gates on atomies,  
Should be call'd tyrants, hitches, murderers.

Rosalind herself is very good at this game, for she talks to Orlando also in a similar strain (IV. i. 83):

The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, videlicet, in a love-cause. Troilus had his brains dash'd out with a Grecian club; yet he did what he could to die before, and he is one of the patterns of love. Leander, he would have liv'd many a fair year, though Hero had turn'd nun, if it had not been for a hot midsummer-night; for, good youth, he went

<sup>10</sup> *More Talking of Shakespeare*, edited by John Garrett (1959), p. 27.

but forth to wash him in the Hellespont, and, being taken with the cramp, was drown'd; and the foolish chroniclers of that age found it was — Hero of Sestos. But these are all lies: men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.

It is characteristic of the jumbled categories in this play that Silvius and Phoebe talk verse, while Orlando and Rosalind talk prose. And when court and forest achieve co-existence enough to orchestrate as follows, we are vastly amused as well as chastely taken aback (V. ii. 76):

*Phe.* Good shepherd, tell this youth what 'tis to love.

*Sil.* It is to be all made of sighs and tears;  
And so am I for Phebe.

*Phe.* And I for Ganymede.

*Orl.* And I for Rosalind.

*Ros.* And I for no woman.

*Sil.* It is to be all made of fantasy,  
All made of passion, and all made of wishes:  
All adoration, duty, and observance,  
All humbleness, all patience, and impatience,  
All purity, all trial, all obedience;  
And so am I for Phebe.

And the stylised affirmations go on, the *lead* being given by the shepherd Silvius. Which is the truth? And which is the mock-truth? And yet Ganymede, beneath the vivacity and sparkle and boyish bravado, is the girl Rosalind whose love for Orlando is an absolute. She swoons on seeing the handkerchief dyed in Orlando's blood. When the limitations of life in Arden or Romantic love have been detailed and exposed, we realise at last how it is Comedy's way to *affirm* the ideal through the very exposure and derogation of the limitations. Jacques the Melancholy Man is a bitter critic of both the ideals, a critic who "pierceth through" everything and everybody; but even he is in a way won over by both. When all are eager to get back to the Court, Jacques decides to join Duke Frederick in *his* retirement. Hazlitt calls Jacques "the prince of philosophical idlers; his only passion is thought"; even so Jacques is human enough to tell Ganymede (IV. i. 1): "I prithee, pretty youth, let me be better acquainted with thee". It is not the least of the tributes that we can pay to Rosalind that she can force such a confession even from this inveterate Monsieur Melancholy.

It is characteristic of Shakespeare's alchemy that what he took over from his 'sources' should have emerged from the forge of his dramatic art as so much purer and brighter metal. The debt to Lodge, and Lyly, and ultimately to Ovid, is clear; and yet the breezes of 'love' that blow in the Forest of Arden have little in common with the calculated techniques and tactics of 'love' waged as a battle and as a campaign, as set forth in *Ars Amatoria* (or, for that matter, *Kamasutra*). Love may be unpredictable or seem to wear the colour of folly, but it is not to be confused with mere frivolity or cynicism; and, always, there is a tacit commitment to purity, and the ideal is *married chastitie*. In *As You Like It*, although the lines of the descent from Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis* are clear enough, still it is already a far cry from Lyly's courtly modes, and from the stylised patterns in *Love's Labour's Lost*, for Shakespeare has outgrown Ovid and Lodge, and Ovid and Lyly, and outgrown even his own earlier scintillating art. Commenting on the advance in integral characterisation as we move, for example, from Berowne to Rosalind, G. K. Hunter writes:

"Berowne, the most supple intelligence in the earlier play, is able to talk to Holofernes or Costard or Armando as well as to his social equals, but he is not implicated in their responses; it is wit, not emotion, that sparks across the social gap. In *As You Like It*, on the other hand, we learn that Rosalind *despises* Jacques, *scorns* Phoebe, *pities* Silvius—in each case there is emotional involvement".<sup>20</sup>

At every turn Rosalind surprises *and* satisfies, she is unpredictable yet supremely herself. Many a moment in the Forest of Arden—like the 'moments' immortalised on the Grecian Urn that attracted Keats's attention—is so perfect in its delicately adjusted poise that one would like the moments to endure for ever; yet the moments pass as they must, and are followed by others no less enchanting. What remains, however, is the cumulative image of that 'golden world' of Arden, which comprises in miniature all the three worlds of Dante. For Rosalind as for her cousin, for Orlando as for his brother, for Phoebe and Silvius, for Audrey and Touchstone, for them all—in several ways and in diverse intensities—'love' has been a call to adventure, a voyage of discovery, and a pilgrimage to the Rose of *married Chastitie*.

<sup>20</sup> John Lyly: *The Humanist as Courtier* (1962), pp. 343-4.



## VI

## TWELFTH NIGHT

According to J. L. Hotson, *Twelfth Night* was first performed at Whitehall on 'Twelfth Night' (the eve of Epiphany, the 12th day from Christmas) in 1600-1.<sup>21</sup> The title of the play makes this likely enough. *The Comedy of Errors* too had, perhaps, been written for a Twelfth Night, and *Twelfth Night* recalls *The Errors* more than any other of Shakespeare's early plays. The celebrations on Twelfth Night were apparently similar to the 'Holi' festivities in India, and were characterised by a certain measure of license and confusion. What would be frowned upon on other occasions was permissible on Twelfth Night. It was a kind of Saturnalia or licensed misrule, and expressed itself in a confusion of authority and identity. Such privileged misrule is witnessed on 'Holi' all over North India even today: urchins could enter the Prime Minister's house and splash him with coloured water, and the Prime Minister might retaliate in the same way. 'Holi' celebrates the birth of Spring, Twelfth Night the eve of Epiphany — the ending of Darkness and the dawn of divine Light. But joy is apt to express itself in strange ways: and, perhaps, regulated rationed mechanised joy is no joy at all. A Dionysian exuberance is thus inseparable from the usual manifestations of joy. If the play was really written for a Twelfth Night celebration, it should be far easier to understand it in that context than if we studied it divorced from the occasion.

Apart from its first presentation, it is certain (as noted in John Manningham's Diary) that it was also performed in the Middle Temple at Candlemas, 1602. Manningham compared *Twelfth Night* with "the *Commedy of Errores*, or *Menechmi* in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called *Inganni*". In *The Errors* (as also in its Plautine original) the twins are brothers; in *Twelfth Night* the twins are a brother and a sister. It is not clear which particular Italian work Manningham had in mind, but if it was *Gl' Ingannati*, there are doubtless certain similarities between this play and *Twelfth Night*. A sister (Lelia) and her brother (Fabrizio) are separated. Finding that Flam-

<sup>21</sup> *The First Night of "Twelfth Night"*, 1954.

minio, the young man she loves, has transferred his affections to Isabella, Lelia assumes male disguise, calls herself Fabio, becomes Flamminio's page, and takes his protestations of love to Isabella. But Isabella herself falls in love with Fabio, while Isabella's father plans to marry Lelia. When Fabrizio appears on the scene, he is taken to be Fabio (that is, a girl in boy's attire) and shut up with Isabella, where the inevitable happens. When all is revealed, Flamminio returns to his former love, Lelia, and marries her. There are subsidiary intrigues also, and there is much that is salacious in the play. But the main equations are clear : Flamminio=Orsino ; Lelia : Fabio=Cesario : Viola ; Fabrizio=Sebastian. In Shakespeare, the story is simpler and purer than in *Gl' Ingannati*. Orsino doesn't jilt Viola ; he isn't aware of *her* at all, it is Cesario from the beginning for him. Viola as Cesario doesn't double-cross her master (as Lelia does) ; though much against her own inclinations and interests, Viola-Cesario does her best to persuade Olivia to return Orsino's love. The impropriety of Isabella and Fabrizio being shut up in a room is avoided in *Twelfth Night*. The lecherous old fathers — Isabella's and Lelia's — are quietly eliminated from the play's scheme.

Numerous variations of the story seem to have survived, and Shakespeare might have been familiar with more than one of them. The closest to *Twelfth Night* is Barnaby Riche's narrative in prose 'Of Apolonius and Silla' included in his *Riche His Farewell to Militarie Profession* (1581). Many of the circumstances of the *Gl' Ingannati* version are here, but Riche's story is less complicated and more decorous. Duke Apolonius (=Orsino), during his stay in Cyprus, makes friends with its Governor, whose daughter, Silla (=Viola), falls in love with him. When Apolonius goes away to Constantinople quite unaware of her love for him, she steals away ; after an attempt at seduction by the ship's captain, she is caught in a shipwreck ; and being saved miraculously, she manages to reach Constantinople, where she assumes a boy's apparel and becomes Apolonius' page, assuming the name of her brother, Silvio. Apolonius, who has in the meantime fallen in love with a widow (Manningham's *Diary* too mentions a Lady Widow), Julina (=Olivia), uses Silla-Silvio as a messenger of love. Now Julina falls in love with Silvio, and when her brother, the real Silvio, comes to Constantinople, Julina as good as seduces him. When he pre-

sently leaves her to seek out his sister Silla, Apolonius suspects that his page has played him false and throws him into a prison. Later, when both Apolonius and Julina charge Silla-Silvio with faithlessness, she bares her breasts to Julina to convince her about her truthful behaviour to both of them. Apolonius recognises her as the girl he had met at Cyprus and marries her. Silla's brother is presently found, and he marries Julina. Unlike Lelia, but like Viola, Silla is loyal to her master, though much against her wish. Some passages come pretty close even to the language of Shakespeare's play. For example, here is a reported conversation which Shakespeare seems to have closely followed :

"... on a tyme, Silvio beyng sent from his maister with a message to the Ladie Julina, as he beganne very earnestly to solicit in his maister's behalfe, Julina, interruptyng hym in his tale, saied : Silvio, it is enough that you have saied for your maister ; from henceforthe, either speake for your selfe or saie nothyng at all".<sup>22</sup>

*Viola.* Madam, I come to whet your gentle thoughts  
On his behalf.

*Olivia.* O, by our leave, I pray you :  
I bade you never speak again of him ;  
But, would you undertake another suit,  
I had rather hear you to solicit that  
Than music from the spheres. (III. i. 102)

"Pardon me, I beseech you", Apolonius tells Silla in the end when all is discovered, "of all suche discoutesies as I have ignorantlie committed towards you, desiring you that without further memorie of aunceient greefes you will accept of me . . ." In the play Orsino says (V. i. 308):

Your master quits you ; and, for your service done him,  
So much against the mettle of your sex,  
So far beneath your soft and tender breeding,  
And since you call'd me master for so long,  
Here is my hand ; you shall from this time be  
Your master's mistress.

The heroine in Riche pursues her man to Constantinople (as Julia does in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*), but Shakespeare simplifies Julina's story, retaining the shipwreck though not the

<sup>22</sup> *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. II (1958), p. 352.

grim antecedent circumstances mentioned in the original. Shakespeare also makes his Olivia a maid, not a widow, and removes the indecorousness of her seducing Silvio. It is thus characteristic of Shakespeare that the changes he made in the Romantic story should be towards greater purity in motivation and action, all indecorousness being left to the underplot in which figure Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, Feste and Malvolio. Literary sleuths have been unable to find exact parallels to Malvolio, Feste and the others; almost as a rule, Shakespeare seems to have picked up the characters for his comic under-plots from everyday life in England. When all the odysseys to locate the 'sources' are ended, when the time comes to strike the final balance-sheet, we can merely marvel how out of materials so stale such a miracle of dramatic and poetic art as *Twelfth Night* could emerge. *Twelfth Night* is far, far beyond its 'sources', far beyond Shakespeare's own plays, *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, with which it has some filiations. It could almost be called the maturest (the 'politest', says Quiller-Couch) of the Romantic comedies.

The rival worlds in *The Merchant of Venice* are the Rialto with its paramount money values and the world of Romantic love where giving is as glorious as grasping, and Shylock and Portia symbolise the two worlds. In *Much Ado*, there is the world of appearance that works havoc with human destinies, a world inhabited by men of little understanding and less faith like Claudio, Don John, and Leonato; and there is the sovereign inner world of Reality, sustained by intuitive understanding and a living faith, as symbolised in a woman like Beatrice. In *As You Like It*, the two worlds are the Court and the Forest. What are the rival worlds in *Twelfth Night*? If the message of Epiphany ("Today we are liberated from darkness and illuminated by the light of divine knowledge") is meant to be insinuated by the title of the play itself,—and it is only for those that cannot or will not receive the intimation that Shakespeare offers the alternative title 'What You Will',—the play has something to do with Darkness and Light, Ignorance and Knowledge. The Romantic world in *Twelfth Night* is itself a sort of cleft world: on one side Orsino's Palace, on the other, Olivia's house. From beyond both come, first Viola to introduce certain complications, then Sebastian to resolve them. Between the Palace and the

house, there are two links : Feste, who feeds Orsino's love with music and Olivia's melancholy with wit, and Viola (Cesario) who, concealing her own love for Orsino, takes his suit to Olivia, inspiring in her a violent passion for the Cesario form of herself. By the end of Act I, the triangular complication is complete : Orsino loves Olivia, Olivia loves Cesario, and Cesario (Viola) loves Orsino. This should be an insoluble problem but for the fact Cesario-Viola is really two personalities in one, Viola doubled with her absent (or dead) brother, and the moment *he* reappears, the solution is easy. Thus the main Romantic plot, although it takes much space, is really the simpler part of the play's total action. There is no conflict between the Orsino and Olivia worlds as such ; when the missing link, Sebastian, is supplied, the pattern neatly adjusts itself. Of the four, only Viola's love is based on true understanding — on honesty — and on the readiness to sacrifice herself for Orsino's sake, if need be. Orsino and Olivia make the most of what they do get in the end. For Sebastian, Olivia is just a lucky find. Puck's love-juice doesn't make more havoc with the Athenian lovers than Viola's disguise does in *Twelfth Night*. Viola sees this clearly when she says (II. ii. 25) :

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness  
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.  
How easy is it for the proper-false  
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms !

Falsity, albeit assumed for an innocent reason, once it starts claims its budget of penalties. Viola's falsity is a venial fault. She really meant no ill. She put on male disguise only as a measure of self-protection. But there are subtler forms of falsity too in the Romantic story. Neither Orsino nor Olivia seems to have right self-knowledge. Not to have correct self-knowledge is to hug falsity and allow it to guide one's actions. It is their spiritual blindness as much as Viola's male disguise that causes their and others' heart-aches till blindness gives place to clear knowledge.

The horizontal Romantic action, which is centred in Olivia's house, with winds blowing upon it, now from Orsino's Palace, now from the outside world (for both Viola and Sebastian are thrown on Illyria's coasts as the result of a shipwreck), is matched by a

vertical action, also centred in Olivia's house. While Olivia has her personal problems to wrestle with, there is on one side (perhaps in an attic) Malvolio who plays the steward with a spider's finesse and efficiency, and there is below the 'Buttery', the underworld, the scene of action of the play's low-comedy and Saturnalia. Superficially, the issue between Malvolio and the revellers in the Buttery is a qualified repetition of the issue between Shylock and the gay young Venetians given to music and frivolity. But in *Twelfth Night* the issue is not quite as sharply polarised. Malvolio has a 'case', and so have the Saturnalians. A world inhabited by Malvolios would be dull beyond words, and a world ruled by the Saturnalians would cease to be viable in no time. It is excess or wrong emphasis that is at fault. Olivia, although she reveals a similar want of balance in her excessive addiction to sorrow in the first instance and later in her wild pursuit of Cesario, can clearly see the mote in the other's eye. She thus finds the right words of rebuke for Malvolio (I. v. 85) :

O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper'd appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon bullets. There is no slander in an allow'd fool, though he do nothing but rail ; nor no railing in a known discreet man, though he do nothing but reprove.

Olivia here holds the balance even between Feste and Malvolio. Likewise, she can both show consideration to Sir Toby ("Cousin, cousin, how have you come so early by this lethargy?") and rate him roundly when she is angered (IV. i. 46) :

Will it be ever thus? Ungracious wretch,  
Fit for mountains and the barbarous caves,  
Where manners ne'er were preach'd! Out of my sight!

Strangely enough, the calculating self-regarding Malvolio world both offers a corrective and is itself corrected by the reckless improvident world of Sir Toby and his crew. It is Olivia who is prepared to live and let live — prize Malvolio's efficiency as a steward yet deplore his vanity and censoriousness, and value too the old kinship solidarities of her class and family, though critical of the noise, waste and indecorousness associated with Sir Toby's behaviour. In the end, Malvolio returns (one hopes) to his

steward's duties as efficient as ever though subdued somewhat, and Sir Toby (now married to Maria) becomes more restrained in his ways though not less witty or gay. The clash of the two worlds in *Twelfth Night* is meant to bring them closer, make each assimilate the virtues of the other while eschewing its vices. Sanctimonious gravity like Malvolio's has to be chastened through laughter and ridicule, while noisy futility like Sir Toby's has to be shocked through rebuffs into a more sober outlook on life. As Gordon puts it, "every excess acts physician to every other. It is first aid all round".<sup>23</sup>

The Epiphanic prayer is : Lead me from Darkness to Light ! But what happens if we do not even know that it is the dark ? Or if we take the false for true or true for false ? Or take Cesario for a man and Sebastian for Cesario ? Or if we take a forged letter for the real one, a casual compliment for a declaration of love, a stray example ("There is example for't : the Lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe") for a universal rule ? Or if wayward moods and random fancies control our actions ? Or if seeing we refuse to see, and hearing refuse to grasp the meaning of what we hear ? It is stalely repeated criticism to say that *Twelfth Night* is about varied forms of self-deception: Orsino deceives himself with the idea of love, Olivia with the idea of mourning or love, Sir Andrew with the idea of wooing and duelling, and Malvolio with a self-image of what is other than the truth. Maria is a shrewd enough woman, and Sir Toby — when he is sober — has his eyes firmly screwed in his head ; and it is fitting that they should marry. Sebastian not only regains his sister (with a ducal brother-in-law thrown in) but also — like Bassanio — gains a good friend in Antonio and a devoted wife in Olivia. But while both the Romantic and the comic actions centre in Olivia's house (the entire last Act takes place before it), the two characters that distribute themselves over all the sectors of the plot are Feste and Viola, and neither is a self-deceiver. The winds of Illyria are impregnated by the strains of Feste's music. Of Feste an Indian critic, Syed Mehdi Imam, writes :

"More sensible than Touchstone, less serious than the Fool of *Lear*, free of the gloom of Jacques, more cultured than the grave-digger of

<sup>23</sup> *Shakespearean Comedy*, p. 19.

*Hamlet*, less dangerous than the clown of *Cleopatra*, he is, in the beautiful setting of the Court of Illyria, . . . essentially a minstrel. On his lips are the follies of song; in his eyes the sparkle of wit; in his wisdom the sharp trebles of Comedy. The Jester has become the artist".

If Feste gives an atmospheric and even an aesthetic unity to the miscellaneous action, Viola is verily the heart and soul of the play. Whether she controls the action or is merely controlled by it, hers is the key role everywhere. It is her mission to find (or force) an entry into self-imprisoned hearts, and there turn up the soil; it is her unconscious role to use her sharp share and drive deep into the sentimental rubbish of human souls, and strike a spring of life beneath, and bring it into the open. By the time her first interview with Olivia is over, the sharp share has already done its work; Olivia has been rendered capable of love. The wonderful image of the lover that Viola projects (I. v. 252) —

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,  
And call upon my soul within the house;  
And write loyal cantons of contemned love  
And sing them loud even to the dead of night;  
Hallow your name to the reverberate hills,  
And make the babbling gossip of the air  
Cry out 'Olivia'! O, you should not rest  
Between the elements of air and earth  
But you should pity me!—

bowls Olivia over, and she answers weakly "You might do much". Viola thus breaks through the walls of both Olivia's and Orsino's self-deceptions, she confounds everybody by strictly being natural and true (except for the male disguise), and she wins even Malvolio's half-hearted admiration. The words she speaks of her supposed dead sister seem to describe herself (she *is* herself) best (II. iv. 106):

My father had a daughter lov'd a man,  
As it might be perhaps were I a woman.  
I should your lordship. . .  
She never told her love.  
But let concealment, like a worm i' th' bud,  
Feed on her damask cheek. She pin'd in thought;  
And with a green and yellow melancholy  
She sat like Patience on a monument,  
Smiling at grief.



Viola does indeed smile her way through the jungle of harsh circumstance till, suddenly, she emerges into the open and finds her guerdon at last.

## VII

## THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

We have seen how in Shakespeare's earlier comedies — from *The Errors* to *A Dream* — elements like farce, caricature, satire, wit, humour, fantasy and romance are promiscuously introduced, and how one or the other aspect — the Comic or the Romantic — seems to gain the upper hand, thereby determining the tone of the play. It is in the four mature comedies — *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* — that the marriage of the worlds of Romantic love and everyday reality, of the soul and body of life, is best consummated as Romantic comedy. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, there is a throw-back on mere comedy, on realism, on satire, though the Anne Page story retains, at least in a diluted form, the flavour (if not the essence) of Romantic comedy. After *The Merry Wives*, the change is sharper — and we move into the world of *Hamlet*, of the Problem Play, and the world of the Tragedies. The sunshine has come and gone, and the sky begins to lour, and we do not know what we are in for.

*The Merry Wives* is a Falstaff play, supposedly a command performance written at short notice to present a play before the Queen showing Falstaff in love. Peter Alexander thinks that it must have been performed on 23 April 1597 at the time of the Garter Feast on St. George's Day at Greenwich.<sup>24</sup> But E. K. Chambers and others give it a date as late as 1600-1, when the play was presumably performed at Windsor; and in any case it was first printed (as a Bad Quarto) only in 1602. As regards its 'sources', while Kenneth Muir feels that "in the present state of our knowledge it is useless to pursue the matter further",<sup>25</sup> Bullough has printed as possible (or probable) sources and analogues as many as 7 'originals', including stories from *Il Pecorone*

<sup>24</sup> *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 125.

<sup>25</sup> *Shakespeare's Sources*, Vol. I, p. 260.

and *Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie* (1590). In the Tarlton story of the two Pisan Lovers, we have a situation analogous to the Ford-Brook-Falstaff-Mrs. Ford intrigue in the play, while in the *Il Pecorone* story, a Professor teaches his pupil Bucciuolo the craft of love, which the latter practises (though unknowingly) on the Professor's own wife. The incident of the lover hidden under linen is improved upon in *The Merry Wives* when Falstaff is hidden and carried away in a buck basket containing "foul shirts and smocks, socks, foul stockings, greasy napkins, that... there was the rankest compound of villainous smell that ever offended nostril" (III. v. 80).

Quiller-Couch, in his edition of the play, put forward a bold and rather fanciful theory regarding its composition :

"The Company, harried by the violent order (of the Queen), hunted out of their repertory a play, *The Jealous Comedy*, of which (he it admitted) we know nothing save that they had performed it on January 5, 1593; and turned Shakespeare upon it to work it up".<sup>26</sup>

This earlier play is supposed to have included some topical fooling on a Count Mumpellgart and a 'borrowing' of horses; and something of this perhaps still survives in Bardolph's words (IV. iv. 1) :

Sir, the Germans desire to have three of your horses; the Duke himself will be tomorrow at court, and they are going to meet him .

Quiller-Couch further argues that the 'revision' was made after Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), and Nym with his 'humour' was probably a caricature of Jonson. The reference to the "purge" given to Ben in one of the *Parnassus* plays<sup>27</sup> —

"O that Ben Jonson is a pestilent fellow, he brought vp *Horace* giving the Poets a pill, but our fellow *Shakespeare* hath given him a purge that made him betray his credit" —

was really an allusion to this portraiture of Nym and his 'humour' in *The Merry Wives*.

If, indeed, it was Elizabeth that forced Shakespeare's hand, it is likely that he wrote *The Merry Wives* only after writing

<sup>26</sup> The *New Shakespeare* edition (1921), p. xxii.

<sup>27</sup> Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, Vol. II, p. 201.

*Henry V*, although the events obviously belong to a period between the 'rejection' at the end of 2 *Henry IV* and Falstaff's death as reported in *Henry V*. When the promise given in the Epilogue to 2 *Henry IV* that the story, with Sir John in it, would be continued was not actually fulfilled in *Henry V*, Elizabeth might in one of her unpredictable moods have asked Shakespeare to resurrect Falstaff and present him in a new aspect. But actually it was like Conan Doyle resurrecting Sherlock Holmes; Holmes 'returns' — but it is not, one feels, the same Holmes. A ghost, however life-like, is but a ghost. "In an evil hour the fat knight turns lover", writes Gordon, "and in an instant his primacy is gone. He should have stayed in the smoking-room".<sup>28</sup> It is not only Falstaff without his pendant, the Prince, but it is also a Falstaff with his headpiece unaccountably damaged. Was Shakespeare sick of the whole business — the 'thematic' necessity to have Falstaff 'rejected' at the end of 2 *Henry IV*, the artistic need to 'kill' him in *Henry V*, and now the need (born of a royal command) to resurrect Falstaff and present him in a ludicrous light? How could Falstaff, the Prince of Comedy, figure as a bloated Romeo — except as a fool, as an old fool, as verily an 'ass' (as he comes to recognise at last: V.v.116)? Discussing Falstaff, Wyndham Lewis effectively compares him with Don Quixote:

"The *humour* of Falstaff achieves the same magical result as Don Quixote's chivalrous delusion — namely it makes him immune from its accidents... The contrast of these two knights is a contrast in two unrealities — two specifics to turn the world by enchantment into something else. One is the sense of humour, the other is the mysticism of chivalry; the first a negation, the latter a positive inspiration. The one, the magic of being *wide awake* (very wide awake — beyond normal common sense): the other of having your eyes naturally sealed up, and of dreaming".<sup>29</sup>

And W. H. Auden goes further in his essay on Falstaff and makes him appear almost a saint, very nearly a Christ-image, a symbol of man living under "the supernatural order of Charity".<sup>30</sup> Of course, there is the other image of Falstaff too — made up of Vice, Iniquity, Riot, anastored (according to Stoll) by Spezzafer, Fracasso, Matamoros, Giangurgolo, Rogantino! — the Falstaff

<sup>28</sup> *Shakespearean Comedy*, p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> *The Lion and the Fox* (1927, 1955), p. 223.

<sup>30</sup> See *The Dyer's Hand* (1963).

whose attraction is more the terrible fascination of evil than the subdued lure of the Good.<sup>31</sup> In either case, the Falstaff of *Henry IV* is a potent figure — masterful and superior — using his humour to rise above his surroundings, using his nimble intelligence to catechise everything, turning everything topsy turvy, and yet rocking the world with laughter. Stoll says that the picture of Falstaff in *The Merry Wives* was needed to complete the figure of the disreputable braggart captain — the rogue had to be presented as a fool as well, as a suitor gulled to an assinine status. Or was it simply a case of confusion of identity, as in *Twelfth Night*? It amused Shakespeare to see that people should take *this* Falstaff to be that *other*, now in "Arthur's bosom". If Olivia should take Cesario for a man and lose her heart to a shadow, let her! If people would take this Ghost at Windsor for the real Falstaff and have a hearty laugh at it, let them!

Not that Falstaff, even in *The Merry Wives*, is ever altogether dull. Quiller-Couch says that "the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives* is the Falstaff of *King Henry IV*; his wit functions in the familiar way and his speech has all the wonted accent".<sup>32</sup> This is like Horatio telling Hamlet (I. ii. 211):

I knew your father;  
These hands are not more alike.

The tantalising thing is the Ghost looks like the Man! In a play where much of the laughter is stimulated by the linguistic and phonetic idiosyncrasies of the Welsh parson, Sir Hugh Evans, and the French physician, Dr. Caius, of Mistress Quickly and Cousin Slender, of Pistol and Nym, Falstaff's speech still retains its primacy, with only the Host of the Garter for a serious competitor. 'Bully' is the Host's word-of-all trades (I. iii):

*Falstaff.* Mine host of the Garter!

*Host.* What says my bully rook? Speak scholarly and wisely.

*Falstaff.* Truly, mine host, I must turn away some of my followers.

*Host.* Discard, bully Hercules; cashier; let them wag; trot, trot.

<sup>31</sup> Stoll, *Shakespeare Studies*, Ch. VIII; also J. D. Wilson. *The Fortunes of Falstaff* (1943).

<sup>32</sup> The *New Shakespeare* edition, p. xxix. Bertrand Evans writes that, like Porolles in *All's Well*, Falstaff too — even Falstaff — is "crush'd with a plot . . . Shakespeare does his best to save him by preserving his native wit. Moreover, he has shrewdly saved the most dazzling display of this wit for those moments when the man is most deceived in his situation". (*Shakespeare's Comedies*, p. 116.)

*Falstaff.* I sit at ten pounds a week.

*Host.* Thou'rt an emperor — Caesar, Keiser, and Pheazar.

Elsewhere, the Host attempts mediation between Evans and Caius (III. i. 92) :

Hear mine Host of the Garter. Am I politic ? am I subtle ? am I a Machiavel ? Shall I lose my doctor ? No ; he gives me the potions and the motions. Shall I lose my parson, my priest, my Sir Hugh ? No ; he gives me the proverbs and the noverbs. Give me thy hand, terrestrial ; so. Give me thy hand, celestial ; so.

But wit like Falstaff's needs the provocation of a Hal or the atmosphere of Shrewsbury to shine at its best. But even in Windsor, — even in this degenerate company, — the rhythm (if not the life and soul) of his prose remains what it was, and some of his improvisations are almost as good as ever (I. iii. 64 ; II. ii. 12) :

She bears the purse too ; she is a region in Guiana, all gold and hounty I will be cheaters to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me ; they shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both . . . We will thrive, lads, we will thrive . . .

Reason, you rogue, reason. Think'st thou I'll endanger my soul gratis ? . . . You stand upon your honour ! . . . I, I, I myself sometimes, leaving the fear of God on the left hand, and hiding mine honour in my necessity, am fain to shuffle, to hedge, and to lurch . . .

He can still laugh at himself even after undergoing the worst humiliations (III. v. 3) :

Have I liv'd to be carried in a basket, like a harrow of hatcher's offal, and to be thrown in the Thames ? . . . and you may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking . . . I had been drown'd but that the shore was shelvy and shallow — a death that I abhor ; for the water swells a man ; and what a thing should I have been when I had been swell'd ! I should have been a mountain of mummy.

The man who once sported the magic of being *wide awake* has now allowed himself to be outwitted over and over again by a few cross-grained men and women. What has happened to his old alacrity of spirit, his inexhaustible buoyancy ? "Have I laid my brain in the sun, and dried it", he asks himself incredulously, "that it wants matter to prevent so gross o'er-reaching as this" ? But even on this supremely mortifying occasion, the laugh is not

against him only; the Romantic sub-plot comes to his rescue. While her father would have Anne Page marry Slender —

O, what a world of vile ill-favour'd faults  
Looks handsome in three hundred pounds a year! —

while her mother plans that Anne should marry the French Doctor, at the culminating point in Falstaff's humiliation both Ford and his wife are covered with discomfiture because Anne manages to double-cross both father and mother and their respective candidates and run away with young Fenton who had formerly "kept company with the wild Prince and Poins" (III. ii. 63). This is some satisfaction to Falstaff (V. v. 221):

I am glad, though you have ta'en a special stand to strike at me, that  
your arrow hath glanc'd

From *I am dejected* in l. 155 to *I am glad* in l. 221 — a matter of a few minutes — Falstaff has had time to recuperate from his wounds, and so the play ends after all on a minor note of triumph for him.

The old heresy that Shakespeare, in giving his Justice Shallow white 'luces' or 'louses' (I. i. 14-6), was paying off old scores against Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote dies hard, although J. S. Smart has proved conclusively that "there is no visible ground for identifying Shallow with Lucy".<sup>33</sup> What is more to the point is the fact that, as in *The Comedy of Errors*, in this *Comedy of Traps* too it is the merchants and their wives that are very much in the foreground. And it is evidently packed with Stratford memories and Stratford personalities. "It is one of the miracles of the great magician", says Dover Wilson, "that this play which he made by a fortnight's work... gives us a truer and more vivid picture of the life and doings of his own Stratford than anything else that has come down to us".<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Shakespeare: Truth and Tradition* (1928), p. 103. According to J. L. Holson, however, the original of Shallow was Justice William Gardiner, who married a Frances Lucy, with luces in her arms.

<sup>34</sup> *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies* (1962), pp. 92-3.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE PROBLEM PLAYS

#### I

##### A QUESTION OF NOMENCLATURE

(It is usual to group *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* together and brand them with a 'name'.) *Troilus* was first printed in 1609, and *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* were for the first time printed only in the First Folio. It is thus difficult to 'date' these plays with anything like precision. Charlton has argued that they might have preceded the Romantic comedies.<sup>1</sup> George Sampson calls *All's Well* "an oddly unsatisfactory play, crude enough to be early, yet mature enough to be late".<sup>2</sup> But the more common view is that all these plays are subsequent to the Romantic comedies and *Hamlet*, and were written between 1601 and 1604. The First Folio included *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* among the Comedies, and printed *Troilus* at the head of the Tragedies. Actually it had been intended to follow *Romeo and Juliet*, but second thoughts on the part of Heminge and Condell shifted the position — and, besides, the play was not listed in the 'Catalogue' prefixed to the Folio. Notwithstanding the Folio classification, critics have been puzzled by these plays that seem to refuse to be herded with one or another group, nor yet to make a distinct group by themselves. In the first (1875) edition of his *Shakspere: His Mind and Art*, Dowden said in a foot-note: "I am unwilling to offer any criticism of *Troilus and Cressida* until I see my way more clearly through certain difficulties respecting

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespearian Comedy*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (1961), p. 260.

its date and ethical significance". In the Preface to the third edition, however, he committed himself in more definite terms he clubbed *All's Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus* together and described them as "serious, dark, ironical"; he assumed that *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night* were written in the course of 1600-2 (perhaps in that order, since Shakespeare continued for a time to write comedy even after his first mature experiments in the tragic mode); and, presently, something happened :

"Then the change comes: *All's Well That Ends Well* is grave and earnest; *Measure for Measure* is dark and bitter. This strange and difficult play (*Troilus*) was a last attempt to continue comedy made when Shakespeare had ceased to be able to smile genially, and when he must be either ironical, or else take a deep, passionate and tragical view of life".

These plays, then, were only superficially comedies, and were a far cry from the Romantic comedies. Grave, earnest, dark, bitter, ironical — these were their distinguishing 'marks'. After these plays (or along with some of them) came the great Tragedies. In a longer note on *Troilus*, reproduced in the same Preface, Dowden compared it with *Timon of Athens*, for if *Troilus*, in its spirit and structure, is a comedy of disillusion, then *Timon* is likewise a tragedy of disillusion. It is a curious circumstance that Heminge and Condell had originally intended that *Troilus* should be sandwiched between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Timon of Athens*. Dowden also found in *Troilus* the reflection of the "mood of contemptuous depreciation of life" that might have then come over Shakespeare. And Dowden added guardedly: "there is perhaps a touch of it in *Hamlet*".

(In the meantime Henrik Ibsen was electrifying Europe by a series of remarkable plays. *Pillars of Society* (1877) was followed by *A Doll's House* (1880); then came *Ghosts* (1881) and *The Wild Duck* (1884), *An Enemy of the People* coming in between; and so on, *Rosmersholm* (1886), *Hedda Gabler* (1890), and the rest. Ibsen had his detractors and partisans everywhere, and in England his 'new drama' was vigorously championed by William Archer and Bernard Shaw. Plays like *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* were explosive 'news', sparking off virulent controversy. Ought Nora to have walked out of her husband's house? Ought Mrs. Alving to have stayed on with her husband? Was



the promise she had given to her son, Oswald, that she would give him poison should he become insane, really binding on her? Ought Gregers to have told the 'truth' to Hjalmer? Was all fair in love (as in war) as Rebecca thought? Why was Hedda driven to destroy Lovborg and then herself? It was a trite remark that, in the new drama, the traditional division — Exposition, Complication, Resolution — gave place to Exposition-Complication-Discussion. "You and I have much to say to one another", says Nora to her husband in the final Act of *A Doll's House*; and this struck Ibsen's contemporaries as a veritable tocsin, portending things sinister and unpredictable. Much to *say*, much to *discuss*; not dialogue but discussion, but discussion only as the necessary preliminary to action. Not the conflict of personalities alone, but more importantly the clash of ideas and ideals, with men and women spearheading them, or even simply being used by them. And the reader in his study — or the audience in the theatre — was also implicated in the discussion, in the spiralling dialectic, and in the imminence of the action. In fact, the debate overflowed the study and the theatre, and was continued in dining rooms, drawing rooms, and the columns of the newspapers. Husbands saw in their wives potential Noras, wives saw in their husbands potential Alvings! (Ibsen's dramas were neither comedies nor tragedies, they were just 'problem plays', — or packets of dynamite.) In this lay their terrible power of fascination. This was what made them so exciting, so personal, so new.

When Frederick S. Boas wrote his *Shakspeare and His Predecessors* (1896), he knew well enough the claims that were being made, even by academic critics like Edmund Gosse, on behalf of the Ibsenite revolution in drama. Without actually bracketing Shakespeare and Ibsen together, Boas nevertheless saw that in *Hamlet*, *Troilus*, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* there was a hint (or, shall we say, an anticipation) of Ibsen, — the same tormented restlessness in mind and the same rottenness of sophistication, — and so he concluded that these so very unconventional plays needed to be grouped separately:

✓ "... we move along dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated, perplexed, for the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome... Dramas so singular in theme and temper cannot be strictly called comedies or

tragedies. We may therefore borrow a convenient phrase from the theatre of today and class them together as Shakespeare's problem plays".<sup>3</sup>

These plays had a curious way, like a python, of coiling round the reader: not the reader's body but his mind: a sort of embrace that one neither particularly enjoyed nor knew how to shake off. In these plays, Shakespearian drama had a fierce intellectual quality — a recognisable contemporaneity — an agonising modernity. Shaw the enfant terrible of the eighteen nineties, although he pretended to deride Shakespeare in season and out of season, nevertheless found a word of praise for *All's Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus* which he presumably thought came closest in their bold intellectual probing to his own *Plays Unpleasant*. In our own century, the plays have received abundant attention, and numerous studies of the individual plays and of the group have appeared on both sides of the Atlantic. Since Boas's time, various descriptive names have been tried, 'Comical Satires', 'Pessimistic Plays', 'Ironie Comedies', 'Cynical Comedies'; but since Tillyard in his study of the plays (1950) included *Hamlet* also in the group, he preferred the term 'Problem Plays' to 'Dark Comedies' (Charlton) and 'Problem Comedies' (W. W. Lawrence), thus going back to Boas himself.

Once the 'Problem Plays' acquired the status of a 'recognised' group, other claimants too began pressing for inclusion in it. Ernest Schanzer argued in 1955 in the *Shakespeare Quarterly* that on account of its 'political' ambiguity, *Julius Caesar* too should be classed as a 'problem play'. In his more recent work, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, he includes not only *Julius Caesar* but also *Antony and Cleopatra* in his group. Perhaps, following the hint thrown out by Dowden, a case might be made for classing *Timon of Athens* also as a problem play. Why not *Coriolanus* then? Which only means that every play of Shakespeare's is truly unique, and once we try to tie up two or three of them for one reason or another, so many more similitudes come to our view that either our old certainties die of surfeit or suffer the serious erosion of doubt. Nevertheless, for convenience we shall consider these five plays — *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus*, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* — as the 'problem plays'. They are close enough to one another (they

<sup>3</sup> *Shakspere and His Predecessors*, p. 345.

were all written in the course of the five years between 1599 and 1604), and there is decided advantage in seeing them as a 'group' before approaching each individually.

When we say that these five are Shakespeare's 'problem plays', what is it that we mean? Has Shakespeare set problems to us? Did the plays set insuperable problems of construction and characterisation to Shakespeare? Is the hard intellectual core more important in the plays than the characters and their actions? In *Macbeth*, there is no ambiguity at all on the moral plane; it was a crime to kill Duncan—and not even Macbeth could have had any doubts about it. Gross filial ingratitude as we find in *King Lear* is a crime too. Iago is a villain, Othello is Iago's dupe and the murderer of Desdemona in consequence. But character, motive and action are more tantalisingly intertwined in the Problem Plays. Was Caesar a tyrant? Was Brutus a murderer? To what moral or metaphysical depths of probing is Hamlet committed in the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy? What was his question of 'conscience'? Why did it enfeeble and immobilise him? What is the 'clue' to Hamlet's sins of omission and commission? Was Troilus right in his ideas of 'honour' and 'love'? Was Helena justified in pursuing Bertram to the point of marriage—and consummation—through ways fair and not so fair? Was Isabella justified in rating her own 'chastity' as of higher import than a brother's life? Does the 'end' justify the 'means'—substituted bed-mates, for example, in both *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*? Besides, which exactly are the 'ends' and which are only the 'means'? Was Hamlet justified in impeaching his mother as he did (in the 'Closet Scene') because the ostensible 'end' was the saving of her soul? How could Brutus be sure that the 'end', namely preventing Caesar from becoming a tyrant, justified the 'means'—the assassination of a friend, a benefactor, a great man and essentially a good man? The questions multiply, but there are no firm answers. And these and other questions—political, moral, metaphysical—seem to transcend the context of the plays, transcend also the Elizabethan and Jacobean backgrounds, and implicate the dramatist, the characters and the audience in a furious whirl of contention and debate that almost comprises all human history from the Trojan War at one end to the latest sensations reported in today's newspaper. The 'actions', of course, are concluded one way or ano-

ther : Caesar is dead, Brutus also is dead : Claudius and Hamlet and Laertes, all are dead : Troilus lives on : Helena has got her Bertram : Claudio's life has been salvaged, Mariana has her Angelo, and Isabella exchanges the Convent for the Ducal Mansion. But we are not satisfied. In our consciousness the Inquisition goes on. We wonder whether we are intended to see reflected in a Brutus, a Hamlet, a Troilus, a Bertram, or even an Angelo, our own noble posturings and futile self-deceptions, — see ourselves as the defeated idealist, the censorious son, the disillusioned Romantic, the self-willed sensualist, the toad-like Pharisee ? We ask and ask, we debate without intermission, we become accusers, violent partisans, prejudiced judges. Often a tone of acerbity comes into our discussions. Isabella's chastity tastes 'rancid' ; Helena is a boy-crazy girl who sticks at nothing to gain her ends. *Troilus* is a bad dark play, though illumined by odd flashes of lightning and poetry. *Hamlet* is almost certainly an artistic failure. *Julius Caesar* has 'misfired' somehow. On the other hand, it is also claimed that Isabella is sainted purity, while Helena is the healer of a King's body as well as her own husband's diseased mind. The Ghost in *Hamlet* is not anti-Christ but a good spirit, an instrument of Providence. Brutus is the study of a politician who brings moral idealism to the arena of political strife. Which is the illusion, and which is the reality ? Why do these plays tantalise us so much and set the critics almost barking at each other ?

(In a 'problem play', while there is no doubt the stress of emotion as well as the unleashing of the passions, yet both seem to be under the inquisition of the Intellect, in which somehow the dramatist and the audience are themselves involved.) Writing of *Troilus and Cressida*, George Sampson says that it is "a history without dignity, a comedy without laughter and a tragedy without tears", but then we also witness a three-fold inquisition going on, and we join it too, — although we are not edified, and we are not amused, and we are not cleansed. At the outset of his *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (1931), W. W. Lawrence says (with only *Troilus*, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* in his mind) that in a 'problem comedy' there is an attempt "to probe the complicated interrelations of character and action, in a situation admitting of different ethical interpretations") (Sehanner, who excludes *Troilus* and *All's Well* but includes *Julius*

*Caesar and Antony and Cleopatra*, starts his study, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (1963), with the definition of a 'problem play' as "a play in which we find a concern with a moral problem which is central to it, presented in such a manner that we are unsure of our moral bearings, so that uncertain and divided responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable". The distressing situation in which Brutus, Isabella and Antony find themselves — having to choose between patriotism and private friendship, or between chastity and sisterly solicitude, or between love and soldierly honour — makes them alternately elicit or provoke our sympathy or antipathy; and it may be added that there is this same ambiguity or confusion or shiftiness in our response to Hamlet, Helena, and some of the other principal characters in the 'problem plays'. As if in desperation, W. W. Lawrence calls the 'problem comedy' a kind of "bastard brother of tragedy", and Schanzer — in equal desperation — attributes our discomfiture to Shakespeare's "dramatic coquetry". Or, as suggested by F. W. Sternfeld, is it because there is lack of music in these plays that the 'problem comedies' fail to delight and soothe us as the romantic comedies do? Again, is it because the intellectual — the dialectical — the sheerly analytical — element is too strong in a play like *Troilus* (or even *Hamlet*) that it just misses the 'tragic' summit of rounded transcendence? We can neither finally solve the problem of 'nomenclature' nor explain satisfactorily why these plays tease us out of our critical certitudes.

The reason, perhaps, is that these plays (not these alone, of course) are large as life, as contemporaneous as today, and hence defy — or elude — the stratification of critical opinion. In his perceptive and illuminating discussion of the Problem Plays, Rossiter suggests that the ultimate cause of our discomfort with the plays may lie in the fact that Shakespeare, while writing them, was trying to project the "tragi-comic view of man", implying a jumbling of the accepted notions of the 'comic' and the 'tragic', an ambivalent attitude to the 'first and last' questions, a call for a 'reevaluation of values' (through the deflation of some of our accepted ideals and the inflation of some others), an invitation to wrestle with appearances in an attempt to storm our way to the hidden reality, and above all implying a *shiftingness* — a chameleonic change of angle — that simultaneously

lights up different aspects of the truth and exposes the varying forms of untruth :

"Hence the 'problem'-quality, and the ease with which any critic who takes a firm line is cancelled out by another. To pursue this shiftingness I should have to explore at length the world of the 1590's : of Donne, of Chapman, of Marston, Jonson and the young Middleton. But this much I can say : it was a world in which human experience, thought and feeling seemed only describable in terms of *paradox* : the greatest of all, man himself. . . . Like Donne's love-poems, these plays throw opposed or contrary views into the mind : only to leave the resulting equations without any settled or soothing solutions. They are all about 'X's' that do not work out."<sup>4</sup>

The strange thing is that, start where we may, — with this or that play, — we are provoked by a chain of correspondences to explore further and further, to feel baffled more and more, to state and then to qualify, to reinforce and then to contradict, till we are left not a little perplexed and sad, — and we nearly acknowledge the scuttling of Reason and are ready to surrender to Faith.

The paradox is here : in a Problem Play, whatever the formal indications (Rome : Elsinore : Troy : Florence : Vienna) the place and time are here and now. It is our world, the stage is our own heart, the seat of our own passions. It is about ourselves, or about people we know. The predicaments are ours, and hence the conclusions are premature for us — we cannot quite accept them — for the conclusions are *for us* yet to be concluded. The baldest realism co-exists with symbolic hopes and possibilities. It is easier to accept the former than the latter. The Problem Play may be viewed as the drama of Becoming — only we don't know what exactly we are becoming. We are in the midst of life and death, and yet (in Dante's words) "this was not life and yet it was not death"<sup>5</sup> ; it might be the nightmare death-in-life. The terrible question invades us from time to time : Was it worth the trouble ? What, after all, has been gained by all this double toil and trouble ? Is it because we are judging too soon ? Each of these plays is, in a manner of speaking, two plays : the play that Shakespeare has concluded, and the play the reader will conclude in his own experience (real or imaginative) in the fulness of time. Shakespeare apparently wants us

<sup>4</sup> *Angel with Horns*, pp. 116, 128.

<sup>5</sup> *Inferno*, xxxiv, l. 25 (Dorothy Sayers's Translation).

to be vexed and perturbed by the issues posed and seemingly (but not really) solved; he wants us to wrestle with the personal, moral and metaphysical dilemmas that confront and exhaust the protagonists of these plays. The demarcation between art and life almost breaks down in these plays; although art ends, life carries the burden still. It is not "To be or not to be"—but "The best is yet to be". Suppose it is otherwise; not the *best* but the *worst* is yet to be? The vicious circles of 'conscience' thus make dupes of us all. We ask for certitudes, and there are none. Even when we boldly formulate them, an inner mumble questions their validity. We needs must diet on paradoxes lacking still the Faith that alone can transcend them and steer us across this region of the mind's defeat in its attempts to come to terms with reality to the "other bank and shoal of time" where the paradoxes shall vex and tease us no more, and Becoming shall have passed into Being.

## II

*JULIUS CAESAR*

*Julius Caesar* is a historical play like *Richard II*, but with a difference. In both the de facto Ruler topples down, partly on account of his own qualities and partly because of the ambitions of others. When Richard's "coronation in reverse" is about to take place, the Bishop of Carlisle articulates in terms of reverberating stridency his fear of the possible consequences of that act of sacrilege (IV. i. 136):

let me prophesy —  
The blood of English shall manure the ground,  
And future ages groan for this foul act ...

The Nemesis, however, is spread over nearly one hundred years, and Shakespeare devotes 7 more plays to present the full implications of the prophecy. In the Roman play, over the dead body of Caesar, Antony also plays the prophet (III. i. 260):

Over thy wounds now do I prophesy ...  
A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;  
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife  
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy ...

And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,  
 With Ate by his side come hot from hell,  
 Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice  
 Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war ...

The Nemesis action is far swifter here than in the English chronicle, for the fall of the conspirators, Brutus and Cassius, is as speedy as their success in bringing down Caesar had been in the first half of the play. There is also another difference. British history was still recent history to Shakespeare, while Roman history partook almost of a heroic and legendary character. Like Hector and Achilles whom Homer had invested with an epiphanic glamour and glory in the *Iliad*, Plutarch had drawn his heroes — Caesar, Brutus, Antony — on more than a mere human scale, or so at least it must have seemed to Shakespeare. Not the history alone, but the drama too, was already in Plutarch. Much of the artistic selection of material and accentuation of detail had been done by Plutarch, and there wasn't much Shakespeare had to do in the matter of characterisation (except, perhaps, with minor figures like Casca) or fitting events into the pattern of causality. It is not surprising, therefore, that *Julius Caesar* stands out more clearly, it seems to affect us more profoundly, than the English historical plays. One reason, perhaps, is that *Julius Caesar* is a brilliant historical play doubled with a Morality, in much the same way in which *Macbeth* also is both.

Nevertheless, *Julius Caesar* is no mimicry of Plutarch with its narrative just cut up into convenient dialogues. It is almost certain that Shakespeare made use of sources other than Plutarch also — for example, Appian's *Auncient Historie and exquisite Chronicle of the Romanes Warres, both Ciuile and Foren*, of which an English translation had appeared in 1578.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, Shakespeare made some use of an earlier play, *Caesar's Revenge*, — though this is far from certain. While undoubtedly his major debt was to Plutarch, it is clear Shakespeare made judicious use of three biographies — those of Caesar, Brutus and Antony — with a view to presenting the murder of Caesar and its consequences in a setting of Elizabethan realism. "The 'commoners' of the first scene", says Parrott, "are not Roman citizens at all,

<sup>6</sup> Cf. E. Schanzer (Ed.), *Shakespeare's Appian* (1956). Also K. Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, Vol. 1, pp. 190ff.



but English craftsmen . . . The cobbler, with his impertinent behaviour to his superiors and his evident enjoyment of his own foolish prattle, is a direct throw-back to the peasants that followed Jack Cade in Shakespeare's first chronicle play".<sup>7</sup> Caesar, Brutus, and the principal characters speak like the Elizabethan noblemen — a Sidney or an Essex — who were masters of a colourful rhetoric or like the great Queen herself when she rarely communicated her thoughts to her Parliament. Further, although the liberties he took with Plutarch were fewer and of less consequence than those he took with Holinshed, still Shakespeare didn't hesitate to touch up the portraits meaningfully, or to forge dramatic telescoping by bridging gaps in time, in the interests of effectiveness. While laying greater stress than Plutarch does on Caesar's physical and spiritual ailments (deafness, exhaustion while swimming, belief in superstition, vanity, pride, self-glorification), Shakespeare also stresses Caesar's nobility and strangely self-sufficing grandeur. Caesar is both reality and myth, and he had become this even in his own life-time; and the myth, in a sense, is almost independent of the reality. This is the reason why, to Brutus' chagrin, the myth survives the man; having grown out of the man, it has now an independent existence even when Caesar himself had been assassinated. The double shift in emphasis (toning down individual features yet toning up the total effect) was dramatically necessary because, on the one hand, the killing of Caesar should seem both a necessary and a feasible proposition, and, on the other, the Phoenix-like survival of the mighty Julius — his spirit, the halo of his name, the continuing potency of the tradition he had helped to establish — should also appear plausible and, indeed, inevitable.

In Plutarch, Brutus makes two speeches after the killing of Caesar, though on the same day, — Antony's funeral oration being delivered only the next day. Shakespeare fuses Brutus' two speeches into one, and fuses the reading of Caesar's Will with Antony's oration, and makes the latter follow immediately after Brutus' — a three-fold compression of events. Up to a point (III. i. 77), the fortunes of the conspirators are on the ascendent: Caesar dies; his enemies are jubilant — and even Brutus loses his customary poise, and quibbles, and talks excitedly (III. i. 104):

<sup>7</sup> *Shakespearean Comedy* (1949), p. 274.

..... then is death a benefit.  
 So are we Caesar's friends, that have abridg'd  
 His time of fearing death. Stoop, Romans, stoop,  
 And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood  
 Up to the elbows ...

"Yet who could have thought", as Lady Macbeth asks in despair, "the old man to have had so much blood in him"? The blood-imagery almost floods the play. Criminals and avengers both lave in this blood. Reading *Julius Caesar* as the dramatisation of a vision embodying the "body-spirit contrast", Wilson Knight makes the illuminating comment:

"Caesar impresses one here as a weak, ailing, small man: yet his life-blood *drenches the play*. Herein is a strong contrast. Often, indeed, we are pointed to a body-spirit contrast. 'In the spirit of men there is no blood' (II. i. 168) — but in the blood of man there is a spirit: hence the power of Caesar's blood throughout the play... We watch human 'bodies' and 'spirits' at work interlocking or severed from each other: but we also see not only the body of Rome but the spirit of Rome too severed from its body by the disorder of insurrection. The modes, personal and political, are unified in the symbol of Caesar: he is both person and state, and so the pouring out of his life-blood is accompanied by the rending of that body which we call nature..."<sup>8</sup>

Flushed with victory, their swords smeared with Caesar's blood, the conspirators crow over the fallen figure

That now on Pompey's basis lies along  
 No worthier than the dust.

In line 123 — hardly 50 lines after Caesar spoke his last words and died — there is news of Antony. The return-movement is about to begin. We are poised on the brink of expectancy. Will Brutus 'appease' Antony, or stop this threatening counter-action at its very birth? Against Cassio's advice, Brutus takes the former course, relying both on his own capacity to control events and on Antony's honouring a gentlemen's agreement. If Brutus was the principal force behind Caesar's fall, Mark Antony now spearheads the avenging movement. It is dramatically necessary that these two should be juxtaposed together for a while so that we may see for ourselves their strength and their weakness. The two orations, coming so close together, serve this purpose admirably.

<sup>8</sup> *The Imperial Theme* (1954 edition), pp. 48, 55.

While Brutus speaks in prose, building up carefully and almost with cold deliberation a dialectic meant to appeal to his audience's *mind*, Antony speaks in verse, and, himself masterfully self-controlled, plays adroitly on the *emotions* of his hearers. The very pauses, digressions, and apologetic poses are artfully placed; his audience is a pipe he would play upon, governing (in Hamlet's language) the ventages with his fingers and thumb and giving it breath with his mouth. "The speech of Antony", says Moulton, "with its mastery of every phase of feeling, is a perfect sonata upon the instrument of the human emotions".<sup>9</sup> Yet it by no means follows that Antony's is the better speech. If Antony's is like a sonata, Brutus' (says Granville-Barker) conforms to "the musical convention of a fugue".<sup>10</sup> Brutus is plain and honest and gives a syllogistical cast to his speech; and he respects the intelligence of his hearers, being convinced that that is the right way. After having just taken a leading part in the killing of Caesar, he faces the Roman mob and apparently persuades them regarding the rightness of his action. Granville-Barker's comment on the speech is penetrating:

"He has won them; not by what he has said, in spite of it, rather: but by what he is. The dramatic intention, and the part the crowd plays in it, is surely plain. Men in the mass do not think, they feel. They are as biddable as children, and as sensitive to suggestion. Mark Antony is to make it plainer".<sup>11</sup>

Caesar's death moves Antony deeply, and stirs in him thoughts of revenge; but he knows he must control both the emotions. The possibility of revenge dulls the edge of poignancy of the sense of bereavement, while the latter appropriately cloaks the strategy of revenge. One balances and helps the other, and together these two emotions — grief and revenge — feed his incipient ambition which for the nonce has irresistible play. In his oration he walks on the razor's edge for a while — lulling the conspirators into complacency in their hour of triumph and simultaneously worming himself imperceptibly into the confidence of the mob, which at first is violently against Caesar and listens to Antony only out of deference to Brutus and of course out of

<sup>9</sup> *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (1885), pp. 199-200.

<sup>10</sup> *Prefaces to Shakespeare, First Series* (1946), p. 105.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 106.

curiosity. The speech itself, with its rhetorical brilliance, its cunning mixture of divers elements that make for successful oratory — reminiscence, flattery, insinuation of the identity of the speaker with the audience, the rising tempo of the derisive references to the 'honourable men', the repeated mention of Caesar's Will but postponement of its reading till the very last, the histrionic location of the various wounds and the identification of the respective assassins, the subtle infusion of the sentiment of pathos, — is important less for what it says of Caesar than for what it tells us of the speaker and for its taking the right measure of the audience. Antony is both honest in his loyalty to the memory of Caesar and unscrupulous with regard to the means he should adopt to avenge his friend's death — and also, incidentally, advance his own ambitions. Fearing that Caesar might become tyrannical, Brutus headed the conspiracy to kill him; with Antony now upon the scene, the immediate first result is the unleashing of mob fury. "Go, fetch fire". "Pluck down benches". "Pluck down forms, windows, anything". Antony is satisfied (III. ii. 261):

Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot,  
Take thou what course thou wilt.

The sacrificial tragedy of Caesar is followed by the pitiful killing of the innocent poetaster, Cinna. The triumvirs meet, Lepidus agrees to his brother's death, Antony to his nephew's; names are pricked down with a callousness it would be impossible to associate with Brutus. And so we are set, not only on the road to Philippi where both Brutus and Cassius will fall, but also on the road to Alexandria — and the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra.

But of course Brutus is the psychological centre of the play. If outwardly it is about the eclipse of Caesar the man and the triumph of the spirit of Caesar (or Caesarism), inwardly it is about the transformation of a dreamer and an idealist into the successful leader of a political conspiracy and his subsequent rapid decline and fall. He is no doubt 'tempted' by Cassius (I. ii), and he doesn't succumb without a struggle; but when the arguments in his famous soliloquy (II. i. 10) are boiled down, they really come to very little:

I know no personal cause to spurn at him,  
But for the general...

Th' abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins  
Remorse from power; and to speak truth of Caesar,  
I have not known when his affections sway'd  
More than his reason...

And since the quarrel  
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,  
Fashion it thus — that what he is, augmented,  
Would run to these and these extremities;  
And therefore think him as a serpent's egg.  
Which, hatch'd, would as his kind grow mischievous,  
And kill him in the shell.

For a contemplated crime so desperate, the motive offered is pitifully inadequate; for a seasoned philosopher, Brutus' tortuous reasoning sounds wholly false; and, as for the conclusion, it is but a trick of metaphor. Brutus is blind to the enormity of the deed, and blind to the consequences that must inevitably flow from it. It is almost worse than a crime, it is a hideous blunder. As J. I. M. Stewart puts it,

"Politically it is futile: committed in the name of sacred equality, it leads directly to a situation in which the populace shout for Brutus as king, Brutus must dominate Cassius, and Antony expounds the subordinate role of Lepidus to an Octavius who will eventually leave Antony himself no role whatever. Ethically it is indefensible..."<sup>12</sup>

Through corrupt criminal means Brutus hopes to prevent Caesar's continued enjoyment of power from corrupting him. But if power corrupts, the means we take to seize power corrupt no less; and the corruption that sets in is a rotting putrefying process that cannot be stayed. The ends ('Peace, freedom, and liberty') do *not* justify the means. If we do evil so that good may come, we shall be — not destroying evil — but only adding greatly to the existing store of evil. At least Macbeth knows *what* he is doing; he is not kidding himself, nor taking refuge in facile self-deception; he knows that, in killing Duncan, he is only seeking the realisation of his own ambition to become King. Once the deed is done, Macbeth is unable to insulate the event from its consequences. He has to go on and on — killing Duncan's servants, killing Banquo, killing Lady Macduff and her children — till he has supped full of horrors. Brutus, on the contrary, thinks that he can stop

<sup>12</sup> *Character and Motive in Shakespeare*, p. 51.

with Caesar. People sometimes ask : Does Brutus err by ' acting ' (rating public duty as being higher than personal loyalty), or does he err by acting ineffectively (sparing Antony in the first instance) ? Macbeth acts effectively enough, and still he too has to knuckle under in the end. One death is already one too many, and hence Brutus' plea to Cassius is : " Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers ". Neither Macbeth nor Brutus is able ultimately to separate the evil deed from its consequences, — a chain of judgements *here* ! Lady Macbeth collapses under the strain sooner than her husband, allows her wits to wander, and dies with a guilty conscience ; Portia grows impatient, falls distract, and dies swallowing fire. Macbeth and Brutus are parallel studies in crime and punishment, and although the former ends as a mere ' hell-hound ' and the latter retains his nobility to the last, it is none the less a fact that they both illustrate the ethical law that cold-blooded murder — whatever the reason, whatever the temptation — is an immitigable crime, and the wages of crime is death.

Caesar and Brutus, then, are the protagonists ; the rest either cluster round them or walk under their shadow. The shallow Calphurnia is balanced by the heroic Portia — " a woman well reputed, Cato's daughter ". Caesar's avenger, Antony, is matched by Brutus' brother-in-law and strong arm, the valiant Cassius. Casca and Cicero, with little in common between them, are yet purposefully brought together on the night of fearful happenings (I. iii). If the slaughter of the wretched Cinna is one of those weird unaccountable cries that we hear at night on the edge of a forest, Lucius' strains of music have precisely the opposite quality. While these varied notes — some harsh or grating, some soothing or ennobling — are heard off and on, while Cassius and Antony claim a good deal of our attention, still it is the Caesar-Brutus theme that fills the play with challenging significance. Caesar is Brutus' friend and benefactor ; perhaps his father as well. Hence the elemental force behind the cry, *Et tu Brute ? — Then fall, Caesar !* It is almost like parricide, — a crime like that of Orestes ! While Dante assigned " hawk-eyed Caesar in his habergeon " to Limbo, the first (and most innocuous) of the circles in Hell, he thrust Brutus and Cassius to the lowest circle to keep company with Judas while Satan forever chews their shades :

As for the pair whose heads hang hitherward :  
 From the black mouth the limbs of Brutus sprawl —  
 See how he writhes and utters never a word ;  
 And strong-thewed Cassius is his fellow-thrall.<sup>13</sup>

That is 'judgement' in theological terms, and Dante the poet couldn't — for all his humanity — altogether transcend mediaeval theology. But for Plutarch, death cancels everything ; and Shakespeare followed Plutarch in this regard. Cassius dies with the words (V. iii. 45) :

Caesar, thou art reveng'd,  
 Even with the sword that kill'd thee.

And Brutus with the words (V. v. 50) :

Caesar, now be still.  
 I kill'd not thee with half so good a will.

They have paid with their life-blood for their terrible crime, and so they are at peace with Caesar's 'spirit'. Now that the nightmare is ended, even his enemies can say only good of Brutus (V. v. 69) :

All the conspirators save only he  
 Did that they did in envy of great Caesar ;  
 He only in a general honest thought  
 And common good to all made one of them.  
 His life was gentle ; and the elements  
 So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up  
 And say to all the world 'This was a man !'

This was Antony speaking, and Octavius is more succinct but no less to the point :

According to his virtue let us use him...  
 Most like a soldier, ordered honourably.

It is clear therefore that, as conceived by Shakespeare, the killing of Caesar ("the noblest man that ever lived in the tide of times") and the extinction of Brutus ("the noblest Roman of them all") form a closely inter-linked double-tragedy, and it is Antony who finds the right words to praise them both.

<sup>13</sup> *Inferno*, xxxiv. 64-7 (Dorothy Sayers's Translation).

## III

## HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

Having dieted himself on some music ('the food of love'), Duke Orsino feels surfeited and exclaims with a sense of exasperation (*Twelfth Night*, 1. i. 9) :

O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou !  
That, notwithstanding thy capacity  
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,  
Of what validity and pitch soe'er,  
But falls into abatement and low price  
Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy,  
That it alone is high fantastical.

We may read 'Hamlet' for 'love' in the above passage, and the sense would be little affected. We reach avidly at every new book, theory or interpretation, — we agitatedly disagree or agree, — and we feel at the end that the 'heart of the mystery' still defies the critic's and the interpreter's cumbrous grasp. "It must not be supposed", Dowden wrote in 1875, "that any *idea*, any magic phrase will solve the difficulties presented by the play, or suddenly illuminate everything in it which is obscure".<sup>14</sup> There is in the play the same hard core of obscurity that we find in life itself, and all attempts to penetrate to the core must prove necessarily frustrating. Another reason is the critic's — or the interpreter's — tendency (an irresistible one evidently) to identify himself with the hero of the play. "Our interest in the protagonist", says Harry Levin, "is a self-involvement; that we are Hamlet".<sup>15</sup> The Indian critic, C. Narayana Menon, writes :

"Probing into the problem of Hamlet, each critic probes into his own mystery; and, in the last analysis, it is the same in all. That is why theories of Hamlet are all eternal, all correct, and all capable of ultimate reconciliation".<sup>16</sup>

There are, of course, ways and ways of approaching the Play, the Prince, and the Problem, and although all roads may lead to Rome, still Rome itself is such a big place that the travellers

<sup>14</sup> *Shakspeare : His Mind and Art*, p. 127.

<sup>15</sup> *The Question of 'Hamlet'* (1959), p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism : An Essay in Synthesis* (1938), p. 185.



may find themselves lodged in different parts of the great imperial city. Entering a caveat against the 'historical' and 'analytical' methods, Menon makes an important point :

"The historical method, ignoring the dynamics of art, relates a play to some single static environment ; the analytical method, lacking integral grasp, threads a solid body as if it were a two-dimensional figure".<sup>17</sup>

The 'psychological' method is less open to objection because, after all, the Shakespearian universe is peopled with men and women, so very like ourselves and yet so unaccountably different. The other methods have their limited uses, but they are no substitute for the psychological method which alone can deliver the goods :

"The only possible test of a theory of Physics or of Hamlet is whether all people repeating the experiment arrive at the same result ; and the significant fact of Shakespeare criticism is that while those who employ the historical or analytical apparatus arrive at widely different results, the psychological theories are capable of ultimate reconciliation".<sup>18</sup>

But Relativist Physics *could* be as tantalising as Hamlet criticism, and so this business of "ultimate reconciliation" must remain only a consummation devoutly to be wished, not a thing actually realisable. When W. H. Auden sees in Falstaff a Christ-image and Stoll sees in the same Falstaff only a Dis-image, where is the common ground ? And Falstaff is supposed to be but a 'prose' Hamlet. If prose can thus confuse, how about poetry ? Narayana Menon himself, while talking of Hamlet, compares him with Mahatma Gandhi. Or the Prince of Denmark could be compared with Gautama, Prince of Kapilavastu. To John Vyvyan, on the other hand, Hamlet is a mere sinner that succumbs to temptation and goes the Judas-way ; in killing Polonius, Hamlet kills Fidelity ; he casts out Love (Ophelia) ; and suffers inevitable death at last making way for Fortinbras, whose "accession means the defeat of humanity and the perpetuation of genocide" !<sup>19</sup> Again, while Bertram Joseph, in his *Conscience and the King* (1953), sees Claudius as one of the two 'mighty opposites' of the play, Rossiter describes him as no more than "an efficient, worldly

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> *The Shakespearian Ethic* (1959), p. 60.

schemer".<sup>20</sup> And how about the Ghost? Richard Flatter has a whole book on him, *Hamlet's Father* (1949), in which he maintains that "the Ghost is not only Hamlet's father, but also the father of the play"; that it is the torch-bearer of "the eternal light, the light of justice"; and that it is more than an 'honest' Ghost—it is also a Saint-like one. Yet Vyvyan sees in the Ghost only a Tempter, an anti-Christ. As for the Queen, while Bradley finds her "very dull and very shallow",<sup>21</sup> Flatter cites instances of her shrewd handling of difficult situations (for example, her report to Claudius on the killing of Polonius by Hamlet, or her report to Laertes on Ophelia's suicide):

"Gertrude a fool? A person should be called very shrewd indeed who is capable of handling a situation as delicate as that in so sagacious and persuasive a manner".<sup>22</sup>

How are we to 'reconcile' views like these that veer between extremes? It is easy—fatally easy—to get lost in the labyrinthine interstices of Hamlet criticism. One has therefore to try one's best to keep straight, though that is not easy either.

In the first place, it is necessary to remember that, from one point of view, *Hamlet* is not just a play; it is a whole universe. The variety of 'matter' it comprises within its 3800 lines might have been distributed by a more parsimonious author between a dozen plays at least. War with Norway, Fortinbras; civil war, Laertes; murder and usurpation, Claudius; adultery and incest, Gertrude; spying, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; eavesdropping, Polonius; decoying, Ophelia; play within the play, the Mouse-trap; foul-play, double-crossing; madness, half-madness, worldly wisdom; ambassadors, guards, grave-diggers; Inquisition and Impeachment, in the closet-scene; love-lust, friendship-feigning; supernatural soliciting; mob excitement, soldiers marching, priestly petulance; fighting on a pirate-ship, scuffle in a grave, a 'friendly' fencing-match; seeming and being, Claudius at prayer; . . . there really seems to be no end. And Hamlet has something or other to do with almost all the elements that are shaken into the compound. In the cellarage scene (I.v), Hamlet exclaims in

<sup>20</sup> *Angel with Horns*, p. 182.

<sup>21</sup> *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> *Hamlet's Father*, p. 22.

desperation about the Ghost, *Hic et ubique*? We may echo the words about Hamlet himself while reading the play, *Hic et ubique*."

In the second place, the Hamlet story is in essentials an old old story. It goes back, indeed, to Abel and Cain, and Claudius himself is aware of this (III. iii. 36) :

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven ;  
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't —  
A brother's murder !

There is something primordial in the motif itself, crucial to the history of the race. In the Aeschylean trilogy we have this tragic pattern : Agamemnon, Aegisthus, Clytaemnestra, Orestes, Py-lades ; and this is matched by Shakespeare's pattern : King Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, Horatio. Going still further back into the night of pre-history, the Priest of Remi was murderer, priest, and consort of Diana, all in one, even as Claudius is at once murderer, King, and consort of Gertrude. In the *Ramayana*, Sugriva kills his elder brother, Vali, and marries his wife, Tara. This has the sanction of Rama himself, the Prince who became God ; but it is also implied that, while such relationships may be permissible among the monkeys (or the lower creation), a different standard of moral behaviour is expected from *human* beings. In fact, Rama and his brothers present a picture of ideal brotherhood, in contrast with Cain-Abel pairs like Sugriva-Vali on the one hand or demons like Vibhishana and Ravana on the other. Among men, brother-murder is one of the most odious, most reprehensible, and most heinous, of crimes. This being the theme of *Hamlet*, we are touched deeply with a disturbing personal involvement which we cannot shake off. "Ay, it is common", — this division in the blood is common, or at least not uncommon, — and so the play turns our eyes into our own souls to see there (III. iv. 90) —

such black and grained spots,  
As will not leave their tinct.

"The roots of Hamlet's story", writes Harry Levin, "like those of Beowulf's, go deep into the bleak and marshy soil of Norse folklore".<sup>23</sup> Scandinavian and Icelandic sagas seem to mention the story in one form or another, and a mediaeval Edda

<sup>23</sup> *The Question of 'Hamlet'* p. 43.

speaks of the hero as Amlodhi. Always it is a story of revenge, with the avenger assuming madness for the purpose. The story grows into a fuller and clearer shape in Saxo Grammaticus' pseudo-history, *Gesta Danorum* or *Historia Danica*, written in Latin in the 12th century, the hero now appearing as Amleth. When Belleforest retold the story in his French *Histoires Tragiques* (1570), Amleth became Hamlet. The main elements and lineaments of the Hamlet story are already in Saxo and Belleforest — including characters corresponding to Gertrude, Horatio, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and situations parallel to the spying, the closet scene, the journey to England, and the substituted letter. In the originals, however, the girl is not a maid like Ophelia but a courtesan.

There was, then, the so-called *Ur-Hamlet*, a Revenge Play which was performed (to judge from an entry in Henslowe's *Diary*) in 1594, though it might have been written and first produced several years earlier. The play itself hasn't survived, and it is being still debated whether Kyd or Shakespeare was its author. In his *Hamlet Unveiled* (1909), Rentala Venkata Subbarau affirmed that  $Q_1$  (1603) was really *Ur-Hamlet* while  $Q_2$  (1604) was the revised version, both being Shakespeare's work. In his essay on 'Hamlet: First Quarto' (included later in *Shakespeare's Workshop*, 1928), W. J. Lawrence expressed a somewhat similar view. Late in 1601 a country company had been presenting *Ur-Hamlet* as if it were the recent Globe success, giving colour to the deception "by making sundry Shakespearian infiltrations, fuller and truer at the beginning than at the end"; and it was this version of *Ur-Hamlet* that an unscrupulous publisher brought out in 1603. On the other hand, Duthie has striven to show that  $Q_1$  was really the Bad Quarto corresponding to the 'good'  $Q_2$ , though it is rather surprising that there should be in  $Q_1$  1240 lines of which there is no trace at all in  $Q_2$ . Subbarau's hypothesis is much the simplest, and explains many things. Of Hamlet age, for example, Subbarau writes:

"... in  $Q_1$  (written in 1598), the poet conceived Hamlet as a prince of 19 years, engaged to Ophelia, who was *older* by five or six years... When  $Q_1$  was rewritten as  $Q_2$  eleven years later (1600), the poet added eleven years to Hamlet's age (making it thirty) as also to Yorick's skull (making it lie in the earth three and twenty years,  $Q_2$ , instead of twelve, as in  $Q_1$ ); but, for obvious reasons, he retained the same age for Ophelia."

Was it because the new *Hamlet* had to bear a resemblance to the Earl of Essex that the change in age was made? While nothing can be quite certain so long as *Ur-Hamlet* is not available, there is good reason for supposing that, although written probably under Kyd's influence, it was really Shakespeare's first draft of *Hamlet*. As for Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, it was a Revenge Play written as a sequel to his own *Jeronimo*. The two main ingredients in *Hamlet* that are not in Saxo or Belleforest — the Ghost, the play within the play — are also in *The Spanish Tragedy*; the rest Shakespeare either took over from *Ur-Hamlet* or he invented them himself along with much else besides. Ignoring *Ur-Hamlet* and the ticklish problem of its authorship, even when Kyd's masterpiece, *The Spanish Tragedy*, alone is taken into consideration, even then Shakespeare's debt to his predecessor is beyond question. As Percy Simpson puts it, "the two masters of the Revenge Play are Kyd, the pioneer, and Shakespeare, who perfected the pattern".<sup>24</sup> A Revenge Play needs a tight plot like the modern detective story and in addition convincing characterisation. Both Kyd and Shakespeare raised the Revenge Play from melodrama to tragedy by making the mind of the avenger the pivot of the action. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronymo is the father who is called upon to avenge the death of his son. But he is not essentially a man of action but a judge, a thinker; and it is not easy for him to slip into the role of an avenger. He broods, he tries methods other than personal revenge, and it is only when these methods fail that he feels driven, almost against his will, to take the law into his own hands. Circumstances as well as his own nature push him to the edge of the precipice where at the very moment he has achieved revenge he also loses his reason completely and bites out his tongue. His moment of 'success' as an avenging father is also the moment of his defeat as a man and as a Christian. The question is not why Hieronymo or Hamlet procrastinated; rather the question is whether, given the humanistic tradition in which they had been brought up and the abhorrence with which contemporary Christian ethic reacted to personal revenge, they could have behaved in any other way.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Studies in Elizabethan Drama*, p. 154.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Lily B. Campbell: "Even as tragedy came, then, to prove that God did punish evil, it came to stress more and more the teaching of

Whatever his 'sources' might have been, — and, here as elsewhere, Shakespeare compounded his complex marvel out of many simples, — he certainly has made himself responsible for the play as it now stands, and the play, only the play's the thing, wherein alone we can hope to catch the 'conscience' of the Prince. The prototypical situation dramatised in *Hamlet* can be simply stated as follows: the starting point is a condition of harmony, which receives a sudden jolt; the confusion gets worse and worse unfounded, till at last harmony is restored after a fashion. The original harmony has to be inferred by going back to a point anterior to the play when King Hamlet was alive and all was apparently well. What sort of young man was Prince Hamlet in those halcyon days? We have Ophelia's vivid picture (III.i.150):

O, what a noble mind...  
 The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;  
 Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
 The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
 Th' observ'd of all observers...

At Wittenberg news reaches him of his father's death (stung in the orchard by a serpent), and he hurries back to Elsinore. One shock is followed by another, and yet another: not only has his father died an unnatural death, his uncle, Claudius, has married his mother and been 'elected' King. This is the situation when the play opens, and reeling under the 3 successive shocks, Hamlet has withdrawn to himself, and from his own plight he generalises about the human condition itself. Thus his first soliloquy (I.ii.133) sets his personal misery in the wider context of a whole world gone awry:

O God! God!  
 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,  
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
 Fie on't! Ah, fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,  
 That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
 Possess it merely.

He would just cease to be, if only he could; but neither his flesh would melt and evaporate of its own accord, nor could he

Renaissance philosophy, that the man sins who would undertake to execute privately the justice of God". (*Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes*, 1930, p. 23).

attempt 'self-slaughter', transgressing the divine law. Patient sufferance is all that is left to him.

At this point (I. ii. 159), his friend Horatio accosts him, and this is some relief. The disclosure about the Ghost energises Hamlet into attention, and so to I. iv when he meets the Ghost and receives the revelations—the fourth and the fifth shocks. A serpent had not stung him, his brother Claudius had poured the poison in his ear as he had lain sleeping in the orchard. ("O my prophetic soul!" is Hamlet's ejaculation.) And Gertrude had been unfaithful to her husband even during his life-time. This double-shock is followed by a double injunction. Hamlet should spare his mother but punish Claudius. In the second of his soliloquies (I. v. 92), a shaken Hamlet vows that he will remember the wrong done to his father, and at the end of the scene he can only wring his hands and cry:

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right!

Let us pause a little, and turn to a distant analogy. Gautama, Prince of Kapilavastu, had lived a sheltered life. Suddenly he comes in contact successively with an *old* man, a *sick* man, and, finally, a *dying* (and soon *dead*) man. Old age, sickness, death: these three shocks—the prevalence of 'evil' in these varied forms—pull the Prince out of his security, and, leaving his wife and child behind him, he goes out to solve the riddle of the evil of this world and the way (if any) out of it. And not until illumination comes to him under the Bodhi Tree can he return to the paths of men and make one of them,—though now as the Enlightened One or the Buddha.

Hamlet is no Gautama, and is not meant to be. But Hamlet too has received shock after shock, and he feels now as though the very ground is giving way under him. His worst apprehensions have come true. His uncle is merely a smiling hypocritical villain: his mother a creature of frailty: Polonius a time-server. Hamlet has therefore every reason to walk warily. He puts on an antique disposition, he avoids people, he broods. Ophelia fails him in this testing time by denying access to her, his former friends—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—prove to be Claudius' spies. If *Frailty, thy name is woman*, then *Deceit, thy name is man*. The gay open-hearted Hamlet becomes horribly suspicious,

he is quick to read the other fellow's thoughts, he is a prey to veering moods and dangerous speculations. But what has happened to the Ghost's injunctions? Hamlet's thoughts do not seem to tend towards revenge. *Remember me!* had been the Ghost's parting words; and Hamlet *does* remember, he cannot long tear his mind away from the circumstances of his father's death and all the developments since. Are such things possible? Can there be such a brother? such a wife? such a mother? Once evil takes a foothold, it extends its tentacles quickly, and the ramifications seem to be endless. If the time itself is out of joint,—if the entire world is an unweeded garden,—how is Hamlet to cut the tares away, and set the world right? What use attempting the impossible? A cold war rages between the smiling omniscient King and the seowling self-immobilised Prince. The Pyrrhus speech by the player brings to the surface of Hamlet's mind the idea of revenge which has so far been merely simmering below. In his long third soliloquy (II. ii. 542), Hamlet exercises himself in abundant self-laceration and ends by planning a 'test' by means of the play 'The Murder of Gonzago':

The spirit I have seen  
May be a devil; and the devil hath power  
To assume a pleasing shape... I'll have grounds  
More relative than this. The play's the thing  
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

While awaiting the 'test', Hamlet's mind is still in a turmoil. Supposing the 'test' establishes Claudius' guilt, even so the primary question will remain: To what end? Thus, on the very eve of the playing of the *The Mouse-trap*, Hamlet starts speculating, not about the success or failure of the test, but about the 'first and last' things. This brings us to the fourth soliloquy, the psychological centre of the play.

This core soliloquy (III. i. 56), although intended to be a soliloquy, is actually overheard by Claudius and Polonius, and also by the 'decoy' Ophelia. But probably it makes little sense to them. Hamlet has now detached himself from his own unique predicament and is generalising about the human situation itself. It is some abstracted universal intelligence directing its gaze on itself — its present prospects and future possibilities. Theodore



Spencer has some apt comments on this new phase of Hamlet's speculative mind :

"No longer is there a grammatical torrent, and no longer is Hamlet thinking about existence as opposed to non-existence only in relation to himself ; he has grown, psychologically and philosophically, so that he can think of the problem more universally".<sup>26</sup>

The key to Hamlet's character, to the springs of his action (or inaction), — and hence to the machinery of the play, — is in this soliloquy. It has been frequently analysed — pulled to pieces — and put back together in the image of the explicationist's construction of the play's meaning and interpretation of Hamlet's character. Actually, the soliloquy starts as though it is really a continuation, elaboration and elucidation of the central ideas of the first soliloquy, excepting that "it is no longer 'I', but 'we' — all humanity — that he reflects upon".<sup>27</sup> While on the surface Hamlet's mind has been occupied with the 'slings and arrows' of everyday life, deep underground the river of speculative dejection has been meandering on and on, and now suddenly leaps into the open :

To be, or not to be — that is the question.

Johnson's annotation is : Before I can form any rational scheme of action under this pressure of distress, *it is necessary to decide, whether, after our present state, we are to be or not to be*. Is there life after death, and if so, what kind of life will it be ? So what agitates Hamlet is the question of personal immortality, not life here and now. But when Dowden, summarising this scene, says that "Hamlet comes by, brooding upon suicide, upon manifold ills of the world, and his own weakness",<sup>28</sup> he is obviously taking the thought of the soliloquy to be 'suicide'. Rossiter's exegesis is more ingenious :

"'To be' means 'Is this act to be ?' ; and there are two acts : the first, nearest to mind, is suicide ; the other is *action*, taking arms against the outside sea (and, presumably, opposing and ending the King). But 'to be or not to be' means also 'to exist or not to exist' ; and thus 'not to

<sup>26</sup> *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, p. 107.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>28</sup> *Shakespeare : His Mind and Art*, pp. 150-1. Bradley also (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 132) thinks that Hamlet is only "meditating on suicide".

be' is the same as 'to be' in the first sense, since one act that might be is self-extinction. And there is a third sense... to exist eternally, to be immortal. For if he can be assured that he is not immortal, then all this can have a final end: whether by suicide or death in attempted action".<sup>29</sup>

Two other samples of annotation: thus Harry Levin—

"That is the question, *esse aut non esse*, which metaphysicians from Plato to Sartre have pondered. Hamlet seeks the essence of things in a world of phenomena, where being must be disentangled from seeming; and since the entanglement is a personal one, perhaps a sword is the only means of escape".<sup>30</sup>

And, finally, thus D. G. James:

"It is hard to know what it is right to do; and we do not know whether in fact we live after we die, and in a universe in which a moral order asserts itself... the plain issue was, Does God exist or not? What was at stake in Hamlet's mind was nothing less than the greatest which confronts our mortal minds".<sup>31</sup>

It is not beyond Hamlet's multiple consciousness to have meant all these meanings (and other variations and fusions of these), from the simplest and most obvious to the most recondite and subtly philosophical. The simple meaning could be: to live or to die? Since evil in its innumerable forms is a fact of life, living means either patient sufferance of all this budget of evil or an all-out resistance to it, which may mean killing others (and, perhaps, meeting one's own death also). As for 'death' the other alternative,—to *court* it deliberately through suicide,—religion absolutely forbids it; and, besides, one should be sure what 'death' exactly means. Does it mean simple total extinction? If not, one doesn't know whether the life to come—the 'life' after 'death'—is a condition so much to be preferred to the life that we are actually living (even with all its humiliations) that one should of one's own accord seek it through suicide. It

<sup>29</sup> *Angel with Horns*, pp. 175-6.

<sup>30</sup> *The Question of 'Hamlet'*, p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> *The Dream of Learning* (1951), p. 42. After so many attempts at explication, it is but fair that we should also recall Lamb's rather downright remark: "I confess myself utterly unable to understand that celebrated soliloquy... it has been so handled and pawed about by declamatory boys and men, and torn so inhumanly from its living place and principle of continuity in the play, till it has become to me a perfect dead member".

is the *fear* of death (and what may happen to us after 'death') that makes us live rather than court death; and this business of living means *either* the sufferance of evil *or* taking arms "against a sea of troubles". We are thus pitifully impaled on the horns of the dilemma *either... or*, and our "conscience" ("some craven scruple/Of thinking too precisely on th' event", IV. iv. 40) compels us to live ignominiously, seeing all, suffering all. One could, of course, fight, whatever the odds against us; but to be able to do so, one needs faith. One needs a firm ground to stand on. One must believe that there is God — that there is a moral order — that the evil of this world is not really as supreme as it seems to be. Like Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Hamlet too would like an answer to the first (and last) question of all: Is there God? To put it in another way: Does a moral order exist after all behind this seeming disorder? The religious ban against self-slaughter is linked up with these metaphysical and ethical questions. And, as yet, Hamlet doesn't know the answers.

After the 'nunnery scene' and the 'Mouse-trap', Hamlet knows for certain that Claudius is guilty of brother-murder. He is a little excited, and in his fifth soliloquy (III. ii. 381) he says that he "could drink hot blood" — *could not would*. But he has to see his mother first. On the way he sees Claudius kneeling, in the attitude of prayer; and, instead of "drinking hot blood", Hamlet furiously thinks aloud again (his fifth soliloquy). No; he wouldn't kill now, because that would be "hire and salary, not revenge". He passes on to his mother's room. But the question is insistent: Why does Hamlet spare Claudius when his guilt has already been proved and he is here conveniently ready for slaughter? "Twists of savage theology", says Granville-Barker; "compunction", says Peter Alexander. It may be both: the former to cover up the latter, which is the real reason. But why? Why not state the real reason? A possible answer is that Hamlet's is a leaping intelligence — "always one jump ahead of himself", says Flatter<sup>32</sup> — or a many-pronged intelligence that simultaneously works at several levels, but not always indicating the connections and transitions. Goldsmith describes the Man in Black as a person who was afraid of betraying his generous impulses; and Alexander explains how, under certain circumstan-

<sup>32</sup> *Hamlet's Father*, p. 95.

ces, a man may "shrink from acknowledging an unfashionable compunction" <sup>33</sup> — even to himself! The double-injunction that Hamlet should both punish Claudius and spare Gertrude is, in fact, impossible of execution; that is part of the reason for Hamlet's failure to proceed against Claudius, both before the Mouse-trap and afterwards. The other part of the reason may very well be Hamlet's disinclination — on rational and perhaps also religious grounds — to resort to personal revenge in cold deliberation. To these two may be added the additional reason that Claudius' defencelessness, his attitude as if at prayer, and his being wholly unaware of danger make it constitutionally and temperamentally impossible for Hamlet to thrust his dagger at the back and kill him out of hand. Claudius indeed might be capable of it (though his preference is for poison); Laertes is to prove that he is capable of it; but Hamlet is not. He may kill in self-defence; he may act with involuntary precipitancy; but the cold-blooded murder of a defenceless man apparently deep at prayer will be murder — deserving of "hire and salary" — not revenge.

In the closet-scene, it looks as though Hamlet is putting more energy into his denunciation of his mother than ever he did in trying to encompass the punishment of his uncle. The Ghost appears once more to whet Hamlet's "almost blunted purpose", though it may be really to restrain his violence in word and gesture towards his mother. It has been an extraordinary inquisition, with Polonius' dead body still lying in the room; and now the interview is over at last. Although Hamlet has killed Polonius by mistake, by that single spasmodic action he starts a new chain-reaction, with himself as the target and Laertes as the avenger. When bidden to proceed to England, he goes willingly enough; but, seeing Fortinbras' army on the march to Poland, Hamlet speaks his seventh (and last) soliloquy, once again full of the usual self-accusations (IV. iv. 32):

How all occasions do inform against me

And spur my dull revenge!

... O, from this time forth,

My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

Reading the play carefully — and conning especially Hamlet's own speeches — one might almost conclude that deep in his being

<sup>33</sup> *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 159.

there is no urge to revenge at all, and Shakespeare wants us to see this. It is true the Mouse-trap has settled his doubts (if ever he had them) regarding Claudius' guilt. But he has yet had no answer to the question of questions, Is there God? The killing of Polonius is certainly no answer to *this* question. Yet, on his return from the abortive voyage, Hamlet seems to be a changed man. He still governs the ventages with such skill that he talks in one way with the grave-diggers, in another way with Osric, in yet another with Laertes — and in a natural way only with Horatio. But some of his new affirmations have a recognisable new ring :

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will . . .

It will be short ; the interim is mine,  
And a man's life's no more than to say ' one ' . . .

Not a whit, we defy augury : there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come ; if it be not to come, it will be now ; if it be not now, yet it will come — the readiness is all. Since no man owes of aught he leaves, what is't to leave betimes. Let be.

It is not "To be, or not to be — that is the question" ; but, with all-sufficing brevity, "Let be". The wheel has come full circle.

But how has such a change come about? Has Hamlet solved that question of questions, after all? He has of course discovered Claudius' plot and substituted the letter — "Why, even in that was heaven ordinaunt"! He has managed — thanks to the pirate ship — to return to Denmark. Twice thus he has been enabled (by Providence? — what else!) to counter effectively Claudius' moves. Are *these* the reasons that give him a new faith in the ways of Providence? Anyhow, in the last scene, he plays the fencing-match with perfect self-possession, and proves that he is a much better player than Laertes. It is only when he detects foul-play that, like a lion roused, he changes rapiers and wounds Laertes. The Queen has in the meantime taken a draught of the poison intended for Hamlet, and her last words are for Hamlet ("O my dear Hamlet!"), and presently the dying Laertes confesses both his part of the crime and the King's. Now at long last, Hamlet can carry out the Ghost's charge, and so Claudius falls, and Laertes and Hamlet exchange forgiveness. As King

Hamlet, in the next few minutes he gives Fortinbras his "dying voice", and persuades Horatio to desist from thoughts of suicide :

Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
To tell my story.

"The dread of something after death" has now become "felicity". The life to come, then, is felicity, nothing less. And for Hamlet, therefore, "the rest is silence", not the sombre immobility of the grave, but the *shanti* of the Upanishads, the peace that passeth understanding. And with Horatio we too repeat the ambrosial words —

Good night, sweet prince,  
And flight of angels sing thee to thy rest !

Perhaps, as suggested by Dorothy Macardie in her *Shakespeare : Man and Boy* (1961), Shakespeare when he wrote Horatio's speech remembered Essex's last words on the scaffold : "When you shall see me stretch out my arms and my neck on the block, and the stroke ready to be given, it would please the everlasting God to send down his angels to carry my soul before His Mercy Seat". Indeed, the parallels between Hamlet's and Essex's careers seem to multiply the closer we look at the two. In his *The Essential Shakespeare*, Dover Wilson said over thirty years ago that "Hamlet is Shakespeare's effort to understand Essex" and that "Hamlet's mystery is the mystery of Essex". More recently, in his *Elizabethan Taste* (1963), John Buxton too has affirmed that "at so many points do these two characters, Essex's and Hamlet's, coincide, even for us who never followed Essex's personal fortunes through that incomparable period of England's history, who never heard his quick brilliant speech, never saw his handsome, melancholy face". Hamlet's tragedy was thus conceived in dramatic terms as Essex's tragedy, — as the Queen's too, and perhaps even as Shakespeare's own.

That is one way of summing up the tragedy of Hamlet — not very satisfactory ! It is like riding through Main Street, and scarcely looking at any but the tallest buildings, and wholly ignoring the other parts of the packed city. The view presented above is that Hamlet, essentially a Prince of Light, is driven by

a series of shocks to explore the dark regions of doubt and despair, stumbling, grumbling, seowling, till the clouds recede and he can accept his role, relying on Providence to guide him. He will not *plan*, he will take things as they come. It is Claudius who does the planning; his equanimity slowly ruffled, he is driven to desperate measures (the embassy to England, the fencing match, the union pearl full of deadly poison), but these only unmask him more and more, strip him of his defences, and finally destroy him. Death comes to the criminal as well as the avenger, but there is a difference too. Claudius' villainy has been *exposed* at last; and he hasn't tried to save even Gertrude from the fate he had prepared for Hamlet. There is no offer from a loyal Horatio to accompany him in his embassy to death; no royal burial for him, no funeral oration by Fortinbras; he dies as a criminal dies, found out and detested by everybody (including Gertrude and Laertes). Death comes to all, sooner or later, but the manner of death is somewhat too. Claudius' is the death of an ugly and venomous serpent trodden underfoot, while Hamlet—alive or dead—is a creature of infinity. After all, Hamlet's mission is not to rule over Denmark but to put out the evil ("the vice of kings") and bring back order, to put down *adharma* and restore *dharma*. All those associated with Claudius, directly or indirectly, are dead; the garden is rid of its weeds (some of its flowers, too, perhaps),—and so Hamlet's role is ended, and he could go. After such knowledge, after such "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts . . . accidental judgements, casual slaughters . . . deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause . . . purposes mistook fall'n on th' inventors' heads", after such knowledge and such a bitter taste of the human condition, what attraction can life have for him? Even so he has been King for a few minutes—every inch a King—and although he dies at the very moment of fulfilment, that is Providence's way too. "Let be".

Caroline Spurgeon has shown in her *Shakespeare's Imagery* (1936) that *Hamlet* reeks of the imagery of sickness, disease and death, and an overwhelming majority of these appear (a point made by both W. H. Clemm and Theodore Spenser) after the middle of the third Act. There is more of such imagery in this play than in any other, though *Troilus and Cressida* follows not far behind. While admitting this, it would still be perverting Shakespeare's intention to say, as G. Wilson Knight does, that—

"In the universe of this play — whatever may have happened in the past — he (Hamlet) is the only discordant element, the only hindrance to happiness, health, and prosperity: a living death in the midst of life . . . Hamlet has been forced into a state of evil: Claudius, whose crime originally placed him there, is in a state of healthy and robust spiritual life".<sup>34</sup>

No amount of white-washing of Claudius can alter the fact that *he* is the source of corruption, and unless he is extirpated normality cannot return. After quoting the following passage (I. v. 61) in which the Ghost of Hamlet's father describes the working of the poison on his system —

Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,  
With juice of cursed hebona in a vial,  
And in the porches of my ears did pour  
The leperous distilment; whose effect  
Holds such an enmity with blood of man  
That swift as quicksilver it courses through  
The natural gates and alleys of the body;  
And with a sudden vigour it doth posset  
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,  
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine:  
And a most instant tetter bark'd about,  
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,  
All my smooth body —

Clemen says that although the ulcer idea derives from the late King's last agonising experience, it becomes "the *leitmotif* of the imagery: the individual occurrence is expanded into a symbol for the central problem of the play. The corruption of land and people throughout Denmark is understood as an imperceptible and irresistible process of poisoning."<sup>35</sup> And, in the last Act, all the four chief actors are poisoned — Claudius and Gertrude by the 'pearl' and Laertes and Hamlet by the envenomed foil. To interpret Claudius as anything other than the prime and proliferating evil in Denmark is really to mis-read the play.

Likewise, while it may be wrong to write off the Ghost as a hallucinatory fantasy and another perversion to equate him with anti-Christ, it would be no less wrong to push the Ghost (as Flatter does) too much into the foreground. It is Hamlet's play,

<sup>34</sup> *The Wheel of Fire* (1930), pp. 44-5.

<sup>35</sup> *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (1951), p. 113.



not his father's. Hamlet himself half believes and half disbelieves in the Ghost, half obeys and half disobeys him. The Ghost is brought in as much to show how Hamlet is his father's son as to show how he also differs from him. Peter Alexander correctly points out that "to what may be called *the instinctive wisdom of antiquity and her heroic passions*, represented so impressively by Hamlet's father, Shakespeare has united *the meditative wisdom of later ages* in Hamlet himself",<sup>36</sup> The sheltered Hamlet of Wittenberg suddenly finds himself face to face before the evil of Claudius' world—the disease, the corruption, the seeming sovereignty of death—and he has to hew his way through the jungle of adverse circumstances, to pass beyond reason and knowledge, and attain the wisdom of submission to the ways of Providence. When all seems hopeless, all is suddenly won; Claudius is put out; the Prince becomes the King, and having done the cleansing and the ordering passes on to the Felicity, the Silence, that is his due.

## IV

## TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

Although Brutus is dead with honour, he has left as a legacy to us the problems that vexed him in his life and drove him to his death. Can we really make a distinction between 'private' obligations and 'public' duties? Can the private friend become the public assassin? Could political murder be justified under any circumstances whatsoever? Could political life be successfully organised on the basis of morality? There are no firm answers to these questions. A Cabinet Minister who may not receive a bribe as such can still receive a donation to help him in his (or his party's) electioneering expenses. Is such a donation too a 'bribe' or not? In totalitarian regimes, the liquidation of political enemies—with or without the farce of 'treason trials'—is common, only too common. In the modern world, the engineering of mob violence or *goonda-raj* (as we call it in India) is only too common. One accordingly reads *Julius Caesar*

<sup>36</sup> *Hamlet: Father and Son* (1955), p. 184.

today with new eyes, for it seems to speak to us with a pointed urgency that we would be criminally foolish to miss.

Likewise, although Hamlet himself has passed into the Great Silence, he too has left *his* problems behind as a legacy to us. The start of the action, the brother-murder, is merely described by the Ghost to Hamlet. But, for Hamlet himself, the simple issue is whether or not private vengeance is permissible. The issue remains with us still. Because the other man is brutal and sordid, must we become sordid and brutal too? "The play dramatises", says Alexander, "the perpetual struggle to which all civilisation that is genuine is doomed".<sup>37</sup> The battling with evil is a perpetual struggle, and from time to time on some chosen man is cast the special role of fighting evil and pushing it back or throwing it out. In the *Gita*, the Lord tells Arjuna (IV. 8):

"For whensoever there is the fading of the Dharma and the uprising of unrighteousness, then I lose myself forth into birth. For the deliverance of the good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for the enthroning of the Right I am born from age to age".

Such men are not necessarily perfect, but the imperfection assumed by perfection is "the whole mystic phenomenon of the universe".<sup>38</sup> However imperfect, they play a decisive 'role' against the evil forces of the time and give a chance for 'good' to prevail again. Even so, it is difficult to generalise as to which is the better way: sufferance or fighting back — Prahlada's way or Rama's? The issue is joined again and again, and however obscure our lives may be, we too may not escape the attentions of evil. *Hamlet* of course is a profound tragedy, because there is — in spite of the suffering and the death — so much 'value' that we feel that the seeming defeat is exceeded by the residual power and the glory. "Tragedy reveals simultaneously", says Richard B. Sewall, "man's total possibilities and his most grievous limitations — all that he should and can do as a creator of good, all that he does or fails to do or cannot do as a creature of fate"; yet "no tragedy can tell the whole truth".<sup>39</sup> *Hamlet* is such a tragedy, both in its achievement and its limitation; but

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>38</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (1959), p. 204.

<sup>39</sup> *The Vision of Tragedy* (1959), p. 106.

it is also a 'problem play', because Hamlet's problem — although he had solved it for himself in his own way — could still come to us in terms of sudden urgency and place us on the rack.

In *Troilus and Cressida* the two themes are War and Love. War means killing; killing is a crime; yet war is sometimes forced upon nations. Unless certain other categorical imperatives control the declaration and prosecution of war, it will be a means, not of restoring 'order' or acquiring 'honour', but of ushering in chaos and reaping eternal dishonour. This was true when the Trojan War and the *Mahabharata* War were fought; and this is even more true in our age of atomic bombs and nuclear fall-outs. The protagonists of the war-theme in *Troilus and Cressida* are Hector and Troilus on the Trojan side, and Ulysses and Achilles on the Greek side. The issue between public weal and private honour, and between universal justice and national glory, is debated in both camps. Minds differ; and it is not always what the man feels that his mind formulates or his tongue articulates, and it is seldom that man's actions are in strict conformity with his words and innermost convictions. No wonder the play is full of contradictions and cross-purposes. The second theme is Love. Now love between man and woman involves sexual union: and sexual union could easily degenerate into lust: and lust does not last — "lechery eats itself" (V. iv. 35). Unless certain categorical imperatives control sex attraction and sex union, they will lead, not to love and marriage and healthy family life, but lust and the expense of spirit in a waste of shame and the inheritance of hell. Sex attraction, which could go as suddenly as it comes, has to be qualified and supported by kinship of minds, loyalty, the willingness to 'give' and 'suffer' and 'sacrifice' even more than the readiness to 'take' or 'enjoy' or 'demand'. Although Hector's parting from Andromache in V. iii is more peremptory and less affecting than the parallel scene in Homer, yet this picture of husband and wife who have grown together in love and fellowship is meant to be contrasted with the settled sensuality of Paris' life with Helen and the much shorter fever of passion between Troilus and Cressida. Just as peace is no theme for the poet, the happy married state also needs no poetic recordation. It is the exceptional, the abnormal, that provokes attention and comment.

For *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare went to Plutarch; for *Hamlet*,

to Saxo, Belleforest and Kyd; and for *Troilus and Cressida*, to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (along with Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid*), Lydgate's *Troy Book* and Caxton's *Recuyell* — and, ultimately, to Homer. Was it Chapman's *Homer*, published in 1598, that gave Shakespeare the idea of dramatising the events of the *Iliad* leading to great Hector's death, but fusing with them the theme of love as treated in Chaucer's poem? Broadly speaking, the 5 Books of *Troilus and Criseyde* correspond to the 5 Acts of Shakespeare's play. Whereas Chaucer's Cressida is a young widow, Shakespeare makes her a pretty maid — "she fetches her breath as short as a new ta'en sparrow", says her uncle Pandarus; but while the poet seems to make allowances for her, the dramatist emphasises her frailty. Shakespeare's Cressida is a Gertrude shrunk in age; she is the 'dark lady' of the Sonnets transferred to the Trojan scene. Shakespeare also deflates Pandarus and Diomedes. The play is about Troilus, and what the 'love' of such a woman can do to enervate a young man and then, when the bubble of illusion bursts, bring out the full man and fighter in him. For the political background and the war-theme, Shakespeare was indebted to Chapman's *Homer*, and also to Lydgate and Caxton. Tillyard says that, while Shakespeare went to Caxton's *Recuyell of the Histories of Troye* for some of his facts, "he found Lydgate much more useful in suggesting ideas and motivation".<sup>40</sup> Summing up his discussion of Shakespeare's 'sources' for *Troilus*, K. Muir aptly remarks that "the play is complete in itself . . . Both the Greeks and the Trojans are depicted less heroically than they are by Caxton and Homer, though, as befits a play with a Trojan hero, the Trojans are presented with rather more sympathy".<sup>41</sup>

The youngest of Priam's sons, Troilus at 22 has won fair renown. Ulysses describes him to Agamemnon thus (IV. v. 97):

Not yet mature, yet matchless; firm of word;  
 Speaking in deeds and deedless in his tongue;  
 Not soon provok'd, nor being provok'd soon calm'd;  
 His heart and hand both open and both free;  
 For what he has he gives, what thinks he shows,  
 Yet gives he not till judgement guide his bounty,  
 Nor dignifies an impair thought with breath;

<sup>40</sup> *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (1950). p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> *Shakespeare's Sources*, Vol. I, p. 96.

Manly as Hector, but more dangerous;  
 For Hector in his blaze of wrath subscribes  
 To tender objects, but he in heat of action  
 Is more vindicative than jealous love.  
 They call him Troilus, and on him erect  
 A second hope as fairly built as Hector.

But the unexpected onslaught of love in the person of Cressida paralyses him, not augments his strength. He needs must use a go-between, and such a one as Pandarus; he is "mad in Cressid's love" (I. i. 50); the mere talk of her prods "the open ulcer of my heart"; when he meets her at last, "his heart beats thicker than a feverous pulse" (III. ii. 35); he has a sense of abysmal insufficiency (III. ii. 76):

"This is the monstrosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite, and the execution confin'd; that the desire is boundless, and the act a slave to limit".

The central scene (III. ii) concludes with the unexpected — and rather premature — stratification of the characters: Troilus the constant lover, Cressida the false woman, and Pandarus the despicable go-between. Troilus' love is almost doomed at the very start, for Cressida is exchanged for the prisoner, Antenor ("one o' th' soundest judgement in Troy"), and with very little persuasion she falls for (or seduces) Diomedes. As for Troilus' brother, Hector, morally the most admirable of the leaders on either side, he allows Achilles to take him at a disadvantage and is butchered by the Myrmidons. This is war without chivalry and humanity, and devoid of honour or glory.

These are the 2 themes, war that degenerates into butchery, and love into lechery. Since each of these themes is itself cleft into two, Shakespeare provides us with the double vision to see them apart and see them together. Thersites the bastard Greek is the constant railer and debunker of war and wenching — war waged by men "with too much blood and too little brain" (V. i. 45). Agamemnon himself "has not so much brain as ear-wax". Menelaus is the horned bull. Ajax is "that mongrel cur", and Achilles is "that dog of as bad a kind" (V. iv. 12). "Nothing but lechery! All incontinent varlets" (V. i. 94). "Lechery, lechery!" Thersites exclaims later: "Still wars and lechery! Nothing else holds fashion. A burning devil take them!"

(V. ii. 192). Like Thersites, there is another debunker (though an ambivalent one) in Trojan Pandarus. He can find something good to say about Aeneas, Antenor, Hector, and Troilus (I. ii) as soldiers, but he can also defile the things he touches; and his enthusiasms are as nauseating as his grouses. What a chasm between the Romantic view of war (or love) and the cynical view! Yet both views are correct—and neither is wholly so. Man is a noble piece of work—yet also the quintessence of dust. Like a god sometimes,—and, sometimes, no better than a beast. In a situation so tantalising, which is the flower, and which the congregation of atoms? Which is the serpent, and which is the rope? There's nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so!

Although there are two distinct themes, although the Romantic and the cynical viewpoints compete for attention, the play is a unity in its action and its whirl of emotion. The Trojan War provides the exotic background. On the Greek side, there is a council of war (I. iii). After 7 years of siege, Troy's walls stand as before; what next? Ulysses makes his classic speech on 'degree'. Disunity in the Greek ranks—what would be called 'groupism' in contemporary Indian politics!—is the cause of their failure to pierce Troy's defences. Achilles stands aloof, and with him Patroclus; and they make mock of the efforts of the rest to bring Troy to submission (I. iii. 178):

And in this fashion  
All our abilities, gifts, natures, shapes.  
Severals and generals of grace exact,  
Achievements, plots, orders, preventions,  
Excitements to the field or speech for truce.  
Success or loss, what is or is not, serves  
As stuff for these two to make paradoxes.

Ulysses, with the help of Nestor, tries to play Ajax against Achilles, but how is 'policy' to control men who are governed by unpredictable emotions and passions? Ulysses' plea for 'order' fails, but he manages in a later scene (III. iii) to strike some fire into Achilles' self-forged lethargy and make him at last come out of his sulks. When Achilles asks, "What, are my deeds forgot?", Ulysses answers (III. iii. 145):

Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back.  
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,

A great-siz'd monster of ingritudes.  
 Those seraps are good deeds past, which are devour'd  
 As fast as they are made, forgot as soon  
 As done.

Achilles is touched to the quick, and he is further taken aback when he finds that his love for the Trojan princess, Polyxena, is no secret at all but known to everybody. Achilles is not wholly won, but he is disturbed sufficiently, and anything may come out of that. Our best-laid schemes are always at the mercy of the irrational element in human nature.

On the Trojan side, too, there is a council of war (II. ii). As Agamemnon there, here presides Priam. Why not surrender Helen, as demanded by the Greeks, and obliterate all the past at one stroke —

all damage else —  
 As honour, loss of time, travail, expense,  
 Wounds, friends, and what else dear that is consum'd  
 In hot digestion of this cormorant war —  
 Shall be struck off.

Hector pleads that this would be politically expedient and ethically right; and his 'reason' is reinforced by Cassandra's 'prophesy'. Yet Troilus (and Paris) would have none of it. Troy's honour is involved. Helen is no marketable commodity in an appeasement drive. Yet it is Hector himself that suddenly yields in the end, having argued the other way all along (II. ii. 186) :

Thus to persist  
 In doing wrong extenuates not wrong.  
 But makes it much more heavy. Hector's opinion  
 Is this, in way of truth. Yet, ne'er the less,  
 My sprightly brethren, I propend to you  
 In resolution to keep Helen still;  
 For 'tis a cause that hath no mean dependence  
 Upon our joint and several dignities.

Hector's volte face recommending the continuance of war (like Hamlet's action in sparing the kneeling King) has puzzled readers and critics alike. If compunction is the reason, why doesn't Hamlet say so? If, in his heart of hearts, he would rather *not* take violent action against the King, why compare himself with Fortinbras to draw the lesson of his own unworthiness? Why

doesn't Hector push his points home and insist on Troy accepting the terms of peace? Why doesn't he act simply in accordance with his clearly expressed convictions? Is it because, in the final analysis, the thrill of action is too great to be resisted? Is it because, as he says a few lines below, he has already sent "a roisting challenge" to the Greeks? Only Hector could have saved the situation, and he wouldn't. The code of 'honour' proves suddenly stronger than the dictates of reason and morality.

Troilus is the link between the two themes of love and war. Like Hotspur he is the protagonist of 'honour' in war, and like Romeo he is the Romantic in love: a curious concatenation. Pandarus' role is akin to that of Juliet's Nurse. The same Troilus who carries the day when the question of returning Helen is debated before Priam is helpless when his own Cressida is bartered away for Antenor. The fraternisation between Greek and Trojan after the Ajax-Hector single combat enables Troilus to visit the Greek camp and, guided by Ulysses, to seek out Cressida at Calchas' tent. And it is there he receives the terrible shock of Cressida's "revolted" love. On this scene Theodore Spencer comments as follows:

"From the purely technical point of view I know nothing like this scene in previous Elizabethan drama. We see the situation from no fewer than four angles... At the back on the inner stage, are Cressida and Diomed, the main focus of attention; on one side of the front stage are Troilus and Ulysses; Thersites is on the other. Cressida and Diomed talk, she strokes his cheek, and their talk and action are interpreted for us by Troilus — emotional, agonised, incredulous — by Ulysses, rationally trying to control Troilus, and by Thersites, to whom all is lechery. Passion, reason and cynicism form the discordant chorus to action".<sup>42</sup>

Ulysses who has already sized up Cressida as one of the "sluttish spoils of opportunity,/And daughters of the game" (IV. v. 62) finds nothing particularly surprising in her present behaviour. But Troilus is shaken, his words carry loads of feverish suggestion, and have a sharp lacerating quality (V. ii. 135):

This she? No; this is Diomed's Cressida.  
If beauty have a soul, this is not she;  
If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,  
If sanctimony be the gods' delight,

<sup>42</sup> *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, p. 118.



If there be rule in unity itself,  
 This was not she . . .  
 The bonds of heaven are slipp'd, dissolv'd, and loos'd :  
 And with another knot, five-finger-tied,  
 The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,  
 The fragments, scraps, the bits, and greasy relics  
 Of her o'er-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed.

"The lines pound with an energy that can find no issue", writes L. C. Knights on this passage, "and we ourselves, in the act of grappling with their meaning, experience something analogous to the physical nausea, evoked in the imagery of the concluding lines, that offers the only possible release".<sup>43</sup> Love had unnerved him these last few days : Cressida's perfidy, when the first shock is over, only helps to steel his heart, and makes him readier for the stress of war than ever before. When the play ends, Troilus has lost, not Cressida alone, but Hector also — Hector that is Priam's crutch and Troy's major pillar of support. Troilus is Troy's first hope henceforth, and, after the fire and brimstone he has successfully gone through, it is very likely he will fittingly take Hector's place. The last heroic words are given to Troilus ; he will be even with the Greeks yet, he will be revenged on Achilles and Diomed both. Thus Shakespeare makes Troilus the heart and soul of the play ; having veered between the extremes of 'honour' in war and idealism in 'love', he has seen them both in their stark ugly and brutal reality — war as cold-blooded slaughter and love as casual lechery. But he has not lost his balance. Trial by fire but purifies gold, though it may scorch or burn away wood ; so it has been with Troilus. And so his last words breathe defiance, not defeat.

## V

*ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL*

In *Troilus and Cressida* our sensibilities had been stretched to the uttermost, and we had been alternately taken to the heights and ducked in the depths. Hector, the great and good fighter, and morally the most worthy of admiration : Ulysses, intellec-

<sup>43</sup> *Some Shakespearean Themes* (1959), p. 80.

tually the subtlest, and the completely wise man: Troilus, passionate and sincere, lover and fighter, and aesthetically the finest — and, along with them, in the very same world we meet also the ruffianly Achilles, the brainless Ajax, and Thersites whose touch is that of pitch which defiles everything. The ambiguity that overwhelms Troilus — *This she? No!* — all but overwhelms us too. Whom shall we take seriously? Is the word or the deed — is the reputation or the brute fact — the true index of a man's life? Is 'value' absolute or something that is subjectively held? The whole texture and structure of reality — Cherub's face, reptile all the rest! — seems to have us in thrall. The play is ended, Pandarus has spoken his croaking epilogue, — but the inquisition in the imagination goes on.

In *All's Well That Ends Well* the heights are much less elevated and the depths are far shallower. The poetry doesn't suddenly waft us to the seventh heaven, nor does the prose adder-like sting us as Thersites' does. *All's Well* seems to be a commonplace affair. The whole point of *Troilus* is the corrosive power of Time (III. iii. 171):

For beauty, wit,  
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,  
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all  
To envious and calumniating Time.

But if Time changes things for the worse, can it not change things for the better? All things pass and change, sometimes for the worse, sometimes for the better. The theme of *All's Well* is thus complementary to that of *Troilus*. A King suffers from fistula. His physicians throw up their hands in despair. But a mere unschooled girl becomes the vehicle of God's grace and cures the King. Death is kept at bay, and forced into a retreat. Again, an apparently worthless young man — "a foolish idle boy, but for all that very ruttish" — is resolutely taken in hand by the same girl, and he improves into a good father and loving husband. The double demonstration in *Troilus* — Achilles' decline into a goonda-murderer and Cressida's into a slut — is paralleled in *All's Well* by the double healing of the King's foul disease and of the young man's moral obliquity. It is, perhaps, the symptom of the fallen human condition that it is easier to present a convincing picture of Achilles playing the butcher with Hector than

of Hamlet playing the compunctious man with Claudius ; and of Cressida falling from her faith than of Bertram rising to goodness and sanity.

Shakespeare's source was a tale of Boccaccio's, as translated by William Painter in his *The Palace of Pleasure* (1575). Shakespeare took the story as well as the names Rossiglione (=Rousillon) and Beltramo (=Bertram), but changed Giletta into Helena. The principal changes introduced are these. Whereas Giletta is rich and is looked after by her own people, Helena is poor except for the medical knowledge her late father, Gerard de Narbon, has bequeathed to her. Helena cures the King in two days, while in Boccaccio it takes 8 days. The 'bed-trick' is resorted to only once in Shakespeare's play, but in the original it is repeated "many other times so secretly, as it was never known: the Counte not thinkinge that he had lien with his wife, but with her whom he loved". Giletta returns sometime after her confinement to Rossiglione upon the occasion of the great feast on the "daye of All Sainetes" showing the Ring and "her pretty brace of Beltraminetti" (Rossiter's phrase), and the Count is satisfied, and takes her back "acknowledging her againe for his lawefull wyfe . . . not onely that daye, but many others he kept great ehere, and from that time forth hee loved and honoured her as his dere spouse and wyfe". In Shakespeare the acceptance and reunion take place before the King, though in Rousillon's Palace. Besides, Shakespeare has added the characters of the admirable Countess of Rousillon (Bertram's mother), Parolles, his servant and companion, Lafcu a sharp-eyed keen-witted old Lord, and Lavache, the clown. While the Countess has received universal praise from the critics, and the King is seen to be more of a benevolent father to his subjects than in the original, the need for the Parolles sub-plot is not as readily accepted. On the other hand, Charles II almost seemed to think that Parolles was the play, even as he thought that Malvolio was the life of *Twelfth Night*.

The plotting of the play is tighter than in the tale, in spite of the additional characters and complications introduced by Shakespeare. In Act I, Bertram and Parolles leave for the Court from Rousillon, followed soon afterwards by Helena, who has her own double mission — to cure the King and to win Bertram for husband. In Act II she achieves this double aim — curing the King.

and marrying the reluctant Bertram; but it is a Pyrrhic victory for her, because he departs for Florence almost at once, after a brutal leave-taking of his wife. In Act III, after a brief return to Rousillon, Helena too leaves for Florence, and there two plans are independently hatched: first, by Bertram and two French Lords, for the unmasking of Parolles; and second, by Helena and two Florentine women (a Widow and her daughter, Diana), for trapping Bertram in the coils of his own sensuality. In Act IV, both the plans are successfully put into execution: Parolles is ambushed and stripped of his pretences, and Bertram succumbs to the 'bed-trick'. In Act V, at Rousillon, Bertram too is stripped of his pretences and defences, but Helena reappears and redeems him finally. "It is the cherishing and preventing love of Helena's whipped virtue", says M. D. H. Parker, "which converts Bertram's every step against ultimate happiness into a step towards it, and such remedies of love are at once ascribed to heaven and lie in ourselves. This, the traditional doctrine of infused grace, is borne out by the plot".<sup>44</sup>

As in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, in *All's Well* and its companion piece *Measure for Measure* too, intended crimes or wrongs are frustrated in time: Providence takes a hand in the game, no doubt making use of human instruments, and the crime is forestalled, the wrong is righted. Still there is an important difference. Portia indeed perpetrates impersonation and casuistry, and Beatrice plays the Fury and instigates murder ('Kill Claudio!'); yet they strike these blows, not in mere self-interest, but on behalf of others. In *All's Well*, on the contrary, Helena is obliged to resort to certain means, which many might deem questionable, to achieve her own personal aims. For example, W. Osborne Brigstocke, the editor of the original *Arden* edition of the play, expressed himself thus: "Everyone who reads this play is at first shocked and perplexed by the revolting idea which underlies the plot. It is revolting; there is no doubt about it". Yet it is only fair to add that what repels us is not Helena but the situation in which she has entangled herself, doubtless with the best of motives. Helena is a masterful, even more than a womanly, woman; she is in this respect somewhat like the heroine of Francois Mauriac's *Galiga*

<sup>44</sup> *The Slave of Life* (1955), pp. 121-2.

(1952). Like Madame Agathe's, like Leonara Dori's, Helena's power too is the "power of the strong-minded over the weak". Mark Van Doren too says that "there is nothing frail about Helena, whose passion is secret but unmeasured. And because her body is real her mind is gifted with a rank, a sometimes masculine fertility".<sup>45</sup> The woman who pursues a man is generally supposed to be a less attractive (or more comical) creature than the man who pursues a woman. For instance, in the *Ramayana*, Surpanakha is presented as a figure of fun when she pursues Rama with her attentions, whereas the Ravana who carries away Sita is but a demon King who lusts after another's wife. However, unlike Madame Agathe in Mauriac's novel, Helena is both young and beautiful, attractive in the eyes of everybody except the one person, Bertram, whose love she needs. "She is young, wise, and fair", says the King; the Countess loves her as much as she loves her son, and refers to her as "the most virtuous gentlewoman that ever nature had praise for creating" (IV. v. 7). And again, with pointed reference to Bertram's antipathy towards Helena, the Countess says (III. ii. 78) :

There's nothing here that is too good for him  
But only she; and she deserves a lord  
That twenty such rude boys might lend upon,  
And call her hourly mistress.

Lefeu, describing her in superlative terms says that her beauty

did astonish the survey  
Of richest eyes; whose words all ears took captive;  
Whose dear perfection hearts that scorn'd to serve  
Humbly call'd mistress. (V. iii. 16)

If Portia appears first as a charming heiress and later as a dispenser of justice, if Beatrice is in the beginning all mirth and no matter, though presently she waxes as a flaming Fury in the service of outraged innocence, then Helena's first role is that of a *healer*. Both the King and Bertram need her healing touch. To be the soft womanly woman — a frail flower like Ophelia or Desdemona to be crushed by the hard and brutal world of man — is not woman's only destined role in life. The true ideal of womanhood includes strength no less than beauty, a capacity to

<sup>45</sup> *Shakespeare* (Doubleday Anchor Paperback), p. 184.

strive and redeem no less than the capacity to surrender and share the sweets of love. To make Bertram happy in spite of himself is her vocation, and if incidentally she cures the King, helps Diana to a good husband, and achieves her own happiness, these need not be included in the reckoning against her. Actually, Helena has received unqualified praise from some of the critics of yesterday and today. "Shakespeare's loveliest character", said Coleridge; "nature, in her single case, seems content to suffer a sweet violation", said Charles Lamb; "here, truly, we have something very like the sublimity of moral courage", said H. N. Hudson; Mrs. Jameson found in Helena the union of "strength and tenderness"; and another perceptive woman, Mary Coleridge, has described Helena as "one of the few women who have ever proposed for men and yet kept their charm".<sup>46</sup>

But it is difficult to think of Helena abstracted from the plot in which she figures in so embarrassing a light. No doubt it is all in the 'source' tale, and it may also be traced back, as W. W. Lawrence has indicated in his book *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*, to the folk-tale and fairy-tale motifs relating to the healing of an ailing King and the improbable fulfilment of certain impossible tasks. Yet this bed-trick business puts the modern reader on the defensive. In the *Mahabharata*, we learn that Vichitravirya's two barren Queens, Ambika and Ambalika, when advised to conceive by Vyasa, first sent a maid-servant as a substitute, then one of them went blindfolded, and the other all in white, with the result the children born were, respectively, the 'illegitimate' Vidura, the blind Dhritarashtra, and the palely white Pandu. But, then, this was in the 'heroic' age! How could Shakespeare try to make serious drama out of the bed-trick? And he repeated the ruse in *Measure for Measure*! Was Shakespeare suffering from a temporary atrophy of his imaginative powers, or had he something to impart by giving the bed-trick a central place in these two 'problem comedies'?

In the history plays, Shakespeare presented with strict veracity one form of human madness: war, and especially civil war. In

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Gordon's *Shakespearian Comedy*, p. 30. As for Helena's persistence, W. W. Lawrence writes: "Just such persistence, such single-minded devotion to a good object, irrespective of all other considerations, was regarded as meritorious. It is one of the most striking features of the Virtue Stories" (*Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*, p. 50).

*All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare presented, with equally uncompromising candour, another form of human madness: lust. In *Troilus and Cressida*, both the lunacies, war and lust, coalesce — "Still wars and lechery! Nothing else holds fashion" — to produce a total indictment the like of which isn't found anywhere else in Shakespeare. Courage, endurance, chivalry, heroism are among the virtues thrown up by war; or, rather, these virtues, which have their proper place in life, turn gross and bestial and destructive and inhuman under the stress of war. The spectacle of the son who has killed his father and of the father who has killed his son, which Shakespeare has juxtaposed in *3 Henry VI* (II. v), is an extreme instance of the criminal insanity that is war. The lust for blood blinds human sensibilities, and both the boy Rutland and the saint Henry are put to the sword. The lust for blood rages with such blinding fury that the father kills his son, the son kills his father, brother kills brother, kinsman kills kinsman, and it is only when the fitful fever is past that awakening comes to taunt and stupefy the survivors. So it is with lust. It is so maddening, so blinding a fever that one hardly even recognises the object of one's lust. There is a story of Maupassant's which tells of a sailor who meets a girl in a brothel and discovers later that it is his own sister. In war killing is done for the sake of killing, and the soldier cannot stop to consider the human features of the enemy who is advancing to kill him — or to get killed. The military uniform further helps to obscure the humanity of the 'enemy', who is strictly impersonal, a thing merely to be resisted or destroyed. The father, when he sees his son in armour, cannot recognise him, and so kills him unaware of the horror of the deed. In much the same way Bertram sleeps with Helena and Angelo with Mariana, wholly unconscious of the exact identity of the partner. Lust is a fierce appetite — "in a sort, lechery eats itself" — fed by a lurid imagination that holds no commerce with sober reality. Bertram and Angelo are alike consumed by this sudden cancerous appetite, and they must feed it even under the double cover of darkness and silence. As Helena, in the hour of her humiliating triumph, exclaims speaking (shall we say) both for herself and Mariana (IV. iv. 21) :

Bul, O strange men !

That can such sweet use make of what they hate.

When saucy trusting of the cozen'd thoughts  
Defiles the pitchy night. So lust doth play  
With what it loathes, for that which is away.

"The woman is left feeling prostituted", comments Rossiter, "knowing that the man can only take her on debasing, defiling terms".<sup>47</sup> Such a passage as this necessarily recalls Sonnet 129, in which Shakespeare describes in scalding language the soul-destroying power of lust :

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
Is lust in action; and till action, lust  
Is perjur'd, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,  
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;  
Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight;  
Past reason hunted, and, no sooner had,  
Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,  
On purpose laid to make the taker mad --  
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;  
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;  
A bliss in proof, and prov'd, a very woe;  
Before, a joy propos'd; behind, a dream.

The craving for sex, a native fierce urge and a basic fact of vital consciousness, can be bound by the silken cord of love, permitted reasonable play within the 'bonds' of marriage, and so enabled to fulfil its evolutionary role as the means of much pure joy as also the central creative principle of life. But promiscuous love is but poor degrading lust, the swinish grovelling in the gutter, debasing the giver as well as the mad or maddened purchaser, and it is a diseased nature that seeks such 'love'. Bertram admits as much when he begs Diana to give herself unto his "sick desires", and Angelo, reclining under the sudden eruption of lustful desire for Isabella, says (*MM*, II. ii. 162) .

What's this, what's this? Is this her fault or mine?  
The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?  
Ha!  
Not she; nor doth she tempt; but it is I  
That, lying by the violet in the sun,  
Do as the carrion does, not as the flow'r.  
Corrupt with virtuous season.

<sup>47</sup> *Angel with Horns*, pp. 101-2. Rossiter also quotes Sonnet 129 by way of comparison in his book published in 1961, but I had juxtaposed



Neither Bertram nor Angelo pretends that his passion is other than base ; not the body alone, but the soul also, is diseased, and this is even more true, perhaps, of Angelo than of Bertram. We cannot charge Bertram, as we can charge Angelo, with playing the Puritan — “ a Pharisee at the outset ”, says E. E. Stoll, “ but a whited sepulchre thereafter ”.<sup>48</sup> Bertram is merely the simple sensual man, brainless and selfish as such men only too often are. Helena might have ‘erred’ against propriety in openly asking the King for the hand of Bertram. But, then, why should the masculine code of honour be raised to the level of scripture ? Helena loves Bertram with a pure unquenchable love, and there can be few affirmations of love more eloquent or sincere than hers (I. iii. 192) :

I know I love in vain, strive against hope ;  
Yet in this captious and intenable sieve  
I still pour in the waters of my love,  
And lack not to lose still. Thus, Indian-like,  
Religious in mine error, I adore  
The sun that looks upon his worshipper  
But knows of him no more.

Viola in *Twelfth Night* is content to “ let concealment, like a worm ‘i th’ bud, feed on her damask cheek ” ; but Helena is more like the Hound of Love that pursues the fleeing man to seize and possess and reform and redeem him, even in spite of his own perversity. It looks as if, says Tillyard, “ Shakespeare not only made Helena and Bertram highly realistic figures but made them represent heavenly grace and natural, unredeemed, man respectively ”.<sup>49</sup> Helena is her husband’s *shakti*, the source of his reviving life and strength, playing the roles of both Isabella and the Duke in *Measure for Measure*. In the end Bertram is shame-faced enough in all conscience — although he has lied “ as basely as ever did any farm lout in a bastardy case ”, in Quiller-Couch’s words, and has prevaricated and played the fool and the cad long enough ; still when Helena appears again before him and says (V. iii. 301) —

Helena’s speech and the sonnet in my lecture at the Annamalai University on 10 March 1955, subsequently printed in the *Journal of the Annamalai University* (XXII, 2), 1960.

<sup>48</sup> *Shakespeare Studies* (1927), p. 109.

<sup>49</sup> *Shakespeare’s Problem Plays*, p. 108.

'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see,  
The name and not the thing . . . —

he is both taken aback and mentally relieved enough to affirm : "Both, both ; O, pardon ! " There is no point in questioning his sincerity here, nor in the promise that follows (albeit it is weakly hypothetical in form), "I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly".

Helena is both self-possessed and humble, and if there is no false pride in her sense of power, there is no pose in her assumption of humility. In her soliloquy (I. i. 202), she says :

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,  
Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky  
Gives us free scope ;

but, later, she tells the King (II. i. 153) : "Of heaven, not me, make an experiment". Although she is partly an instrument of Providence, she also receives abundant help from the Countess, the King, Lefeu, and (curiously enough) even from Parolles. In trying to turn the Beltramo of the old tale into a reasonably credible character undergoing a shock-treatment that is to make a new man of him, Shakespeare felt the need to balance the pull of Helena by the contrariwise pull of Parolles. It is when Bertram finds that Parolles is not what he had taken him to be that he receives the first serious dent in his armour of churlish self-satisfaction. If he could have been wrong about Parolles, why should he not have misjudged Helena also ? "The Bertram story would not mean the same without the Parolles story", says G. K. Hunter, and adds :

"There is continual parody of the one by the other. Parolles and Helena are arranged on either side of Bertram, placed rather like the Evil and Good Angels in a Morality. His selfish ostentation balances her selfless abnegation ; both are poor people making good in a world open to adventurers, but the magical and romantic actions of Helena are in strong contrast to the prosaic opportunism of Parolles".<sup>50</sup>

Bertram being only a callow youth is redeemed in time. As for Parolles, he cannot be snuffed out easily, whatever the degradation into which he may fall. Bertram of course is no Hal, and likewise Parolles is no Falstaff. But even as a worm is interest-

<sup>50</sup> The *New Arden* edition, p. xxxiii.

ing as a worm, and a beetle as a beetle, so also can Parolles — once we know him for what he is : not the gallant militarist who has the whole theoric of war in the knot of his scarf : not the manifold linguist and the omnipotent soldier : but simply the foolish vain man crushed with a plot, whom Fortune hath cruelly scratch'd — be just tolerated. As against Parolles' (IV. iii. 310) —

Simply the thing I am  
Shall make me live . . .  
There's place and means for every man alive —

we can set Lefeu's (V. ii. 50): "Though you are a fool and a knave, you shall eat". Shakespeare understands all, and almost forgives all; and thus even a Parolles can bask in the sunshine of Shakespeare's inexhaustible and universal tolerance.

## VI

### MEASURE FOR MEASURE

With a play like *Measure for Measure*, the discussion of 'sources' could be most interesting, since several of these 'sources' and 'analogues' have been located and most of these have been printed by Bullough in the second volume of his *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1958). The Latin tragedy, *Philanira* (1556) by Claude Rouillet, probably only dramatised an actual occurrence in 1547. It is the story of a wife (*Philanira*) who yields to the judge (*Severus*) in order to save her husband (*Hippolytus*). The judge sends her husband to her indeed, but as a corpse. She appeals to the overlord who compels the seducer to marry the victim, and then puts him to death, the hapless woman having now to bemoan the death of both her husbands. When Giraldi Cinthio told the story (first as a tale in *Hecatommithi*, 1565, and later in a play *Epitia*), he made the triangle consist of a brother (instead of the husband), Vico; his sister, *Epitia*; and the judge, *Juriste*. After the double outrage (the one on herself being followed by the execution of her brother in spite of the promise to the contrary), *Epitia* appeals to the Emperor Maximian who compels *Juriste* to marry her, and then orders his execution; but she pleads with the Emperor and persuades him to spare her husband. In the play, *Epitia*, the

brother is not really dead (only a substitute having been executed), and so it is easier for Epitia to plead for the life of Juriste and for the request to be granted. When George Whetstone wrote his 10-act play, *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), he knew Cinthio's tale but not the play, and hence the complication (the execution of a double) by means of which both brother and judge are saved must have occurred to him independently. In 1582, Whetstone made a tale out of his play and included it in his *Heptameron of Civill Discourses*, but the main lines of the story remained. *Epitia* itself was published in Italy in 1583, and recent scholarship holds that Shakespeare might have used both Whetstone and Cinthio's play, *Epitia*.

The changes Shakespeare has introduced are as usual significant. Like Whetstone, Shakespeare too 'saves' from death both the brother and the judge. But there was one *piece de resistance* in all the earlier versions: the sister (or wife) agreeing to the judge's nefarious solicitation. With that fanatic regard for the purity of his heroines which is so characteristic of him, Shakespeare decided that he would save his Isabella from this taint. This became all the more necessary because he visualised an Isabella trained by the Sisters of Saint Clare, who is herself to become a nun soon. Shakespeare has accordingly had to introduce the bed-trick, used already in *All's Well*, and so he has created Mariana of the "moated grange, at Saint Luke's" and made her story a kind of duplication of the main theme. (If Claudio had anticipated marriage in his relations with Juliet, Angelo had denied marriage after having led Mariana to expect it — and had added insult to injury by hiding the real reason (an inadequate dowry) and casting unworthy aspersions on her character. Shakespeare thus preserves Isabella's personal purity and makes her plead for Angelo's life (even while thinking that Claudio has been executed: not, as in *Epitia*, after the heroine knows that her brother is indeed alive), and this for two reasons: partly because she tries to see Angelo with Mariana's eyes, and also because of her habit of thinking in terms of the Gospel ethic.) It is surprising that Tillyard should think that "Shakespeare by altering the plot and by re-creating his heroine, however superb the immediate result, could only ruin the play as a whole".<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*, p. 132.

The other major change is in the character and function of the Duke. In all the earlier versions, his prototype is only the appellate authority who metes out justice when appealed to by the victim of the judge's double-dealing. In Shakespeare, the Duke is an invisible witness of the proceedings throughout, and even a sharer in the action; almost, indeed, the *sutradhara* pulling the wires, the machinery, of the "controlled experiment" concerning the interplay of human character, motive and action. The folk-story or fairy-tale motif of the benevolent Prince wandering (like a Haroun al Raschid) among his subjects incognito is here purposively fused with the bed-trick motif and the motif of magisterial perfidy, and the result is a play that has more than one dimension, a play in which the romantic and the sordid, the allegoric and the realistic, are compounded into a work of dramatic art that glances from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven, and gives body and life and soul to the deathless words of the Gospel according to St. Matthew (vii. 1-5):

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerst not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye?

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

The Duke has been admonished by some critics,<sup>52</sup> for his initial irresponsibility in withdrawing from power and entrusting the State to a man known to be unreliable, for his eavesdropping and continual meddlesomeness, for his callousness in making Isabella believe that her brother is dead, and, above all, for the apparently casual manner in which he makes his 'proposal' to Isabella towards the end of the play. But he has also, and with far more justification, been elevated into a symbol and a Power. — almost a "divinity that shapes our ends/Rough-hew them 'how we will'". Thus G. Wilson Knight:

<sup>52</sup> For example, Clifford Leech, 'The Meaning of *Measure for Measure*', in *Shakespeare Survey* 3, 1950; a reply by S. Nagarajan ('A Note on the Duke in *Measure for Measure*') appears in the *Half-Yearly Journal of the Mysore University*, XIII, 2, 1953.

"The Duke, lord of this play in the exact sense that Prospero is lord of *The Tempest*, is the prophet of an enlightened ethic. He controls the action from start to finish, he allots, as it were, praise and blame, he is lit at moments with divine suggestion comparable with his almost divine power of fore-knowledge, and control, and wisdom".<sup>53</sup>

For F. R. Leavis, the Duke is "the more-than-Prospero of the play . . . who initiates and controls the experimental demonstration—the controlled experiment—that forms the action".<sup>54</sup> And for R. W. Battenhouse, the Duke is verily the Incarnate Lord in this stupendous allegory of the Atonement.<sup>55</sup>

If Helena first appears in *All's Well* as a healer, Isabella as she emerges from the convent has to play the role of an angel of mercy. Portia, Beatrice, Helena, Isabella: four such young heroines seem to be the manifestations of Mahalakshmi, Mahakali, Mahasaraswati, and Maheshwari, bringing to their earth-play divers aspects of the Mother, the supreme world-creatix, and redeeming the erring world of man. Isabella has left the cloister to plead for the life of her condemned brother. An air of sanctity envelops her, and holy, fair, and chaste is she. Even coarse-grained Lucio sees some sure hope of success in her mission (I. iv. 79):

Go to Lord Angelo,  
And let him learn to know, when maidens sue,  
Men give like gods; but when they weep and kneel,  
All their petitions are as freely theirs  
As they themselves would owe them.

From the very moment of her stepping out of the cloister into the world, she is fated to prove a disturbing influence on others. Many lives suffer a 'sea-change' on account of her impact upon them. Like Browning's Pippa, for example: only, unlike Pippa, who changes others while remaining untouched herself and even unaware of the redemptive power that flows from her, Isabella's is an active mission, she changes others and herself grows in

<sup>53</sup> *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 81.

<sup>54</sup> *The Common Pursuit* (Peregrine Edition), pp. 169-70.

<sup>55</sup> PMLA, LXI, 1946. As regards the symbolism of the names, it has been suggested that Vincenzio (the Duke) = the Conqueror; Angelo = Angel, indicative of Satan the fallen angel; and Mariana = Mary+Anne, the Virgin and her Mother. (Henry Fuchere, *Shakespeare*, translated by Guy Hamilton, 1953, p. 220).

wisdom and experience. As she comes straight from the cloister, the Christian plea for mercy admirably becomes her. "The very incandescence of her compassion transcends the personal occasion", writes Mary Lascelle, "carrying her to a height at which if she would plead for one man, she must plead for all".<sup>56</sup> When Angelo says that Claudio, her brother, "is a forfeit of the law", Isabella breaks out into her first absolutely noble utterance in the play (II. ii. 72):

Alas ! alas !  
Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once ;  
And He that might the vantage best have took  
Found out the remedy.

Although the mere human being occasionally leaps out of her — as when she says "I will proclaim thee, Angelo, look for't" (II. iv. 151), or when she cries "O, I will to him and pluck out his eyes" (IV. iii. 116) — Isabella is to be viewed essentially as the Angel of Mercy, bodying forth the Christian ethic.)

John Vyvyan has submitted *Measure for Measure* to a "Terentian analysis"<sup>57</sup> and shown how the issue — Is Claudio to live or die? — is posed in the first Act, with the life-directed and death-directed forces pulling in opposite directions. In the end, the power-divine of the Duke and the 'love-power' of Mariana save Claudio, and achieve an all-inclusive victory for love and life. (Vyvyan is critical of Isabella, and attributes his own allergy to Shakespeare himself :

"... the exalting of Christianity above life and humanity is, in his (Shakespeare's) view, a moral fault. This is Isabella's temptation, to which she yields ; and it would have led on . . . to the full tragic climax — her brother's death by torture, and the plucking out of Angelo's eyes".<sup>58</sup>

This seems to be a perverse misreading of the play, for Shakespeare's plotting is clear and purposive. The Exposition in Act I is followed by Angelo's 'proposal' in Act II, the Duke's proposal to double-cross Angelo in Act III, Angelo actually double-crossing Isabella (as he thinks) in Act IV, and the Resolution in the Act V. When we look closer into the plot, we find the same

<sup>56</sup> *Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure'* (1953).

<sup>57</sup> *Shakespeare and the Rose of Love* (1960), pp. 18-9.

<sup>58</sup> *The Shakespearean Ethic* (1959), p. 73.

sense of propriety and adequacy in the details as there is in the general design. In I. i the Duke announces his decision to withdraw from Vienna for a time, and he appoints Angelo in his place with Escalus to advise him. I. ii splits up into 4 sub-scenes : 1-42, Lucio and 2 other Gentlemen gaily talking about 'sin' ; 43-80, Mistress Overdone giving intimation of Claudio's 'wages' for sinning with Juliet ; 81-108, Overdone bemoaning the decay of custom to people like her ; and 108-186, Lucio (the sinner) appearing and requesting Lucio to meet Isabella (the redeemer) and ask her to plead with the "strict deputy" :

in her youth

There is a prone and speechless dialect  
Such as move men ; besides, she hath prosperous art  
When she will play with reason and discourse,  
And well she can persuade.

In the course of one scene all is projected vividly : the sin, the wages, the promoter of sin, the beneficiaries, the prosecutor, the redeemer. In II. ii Isabella has her first interview with Angelo ; and he feels tempted, although *she* is blissfully unaware of the insurrection she has caused in his bosom. In II. iv, he explicitly comes out with his 'bargain', and she more or less runs out, in a panic of helplessness. But there is no 'inner struggle' ; she is quite clear in her mind that she cannot purchase her brother's reprieve on *these* terms. Is it because, as Rossiter argues, "scared souls are small souls ; as she leaves Angelo, Isabella's soul is scared — to a tiny rod of iron principle which is all she can think" ? <sup>50</sup> Not the Isabella who could spell out these words boldly to the Deputy only the previous day (II. ii. 110) :

Could great men thunder  
As Jove himself does, Jove would never be quiet,  
For every pelting petty officer  
Would use his heaven for thunder,  
Nothing but thunder. Merciful Heaven,  
Thou rather, with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt,  
Splits the unwedgeable and gnarled oak  
Than the soft myrtle. But man, proud man,  
Dress'd in a little brief authority,  
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,

<sup>50</sup> *Angel with Horns*, p. 160.



His glassy essence, like an angry ape,  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
As makes the angels weep . . .

And again (II. ii. 136), more boldly still :

Go to your bosom,  
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know  
That's like my brother's fault. If it confess  
A natural guiltiness such as is his,  
Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue  
Against my brother's life.

Quite possibly Angelo was scared then ; not only scared but felt almost doomed. Even during her second interview, even after he has made clear his meaning, she speaks coolly enough finding the right words for the occasion. She will willingly bear the impression of keen whips and "strip myself to death as to a bed" before yielding up her body to shame (II. iv. 106) :

Better it were a brother died at once  
Than that a sister, by redeeming him,  
Should die for ever . . .  
Ignominy in ransom and free pardon  
Are of two houses : lawful mercy  
Is nothing kin to foul redemption.

It is not just the scared physical cry of the "reluctant flesh", but something fundamental, — a spiritual abhorrence that is like a total categorical Nay. There is in Isabella's whole aspect a radiant purity before which Angelo — although he has been aptly described by Lucio as "a man whose blood is very snow-broth, one who never feels the wanton stings and emotions of the sense" (I. iv. 57) — quails somewhat, and instead of rejecting her suit outright, asks her to meet him the next day, and it is with some difficulty that he tells her what he wants even on this occasion. What can she say ? She tries first to make him understand what sort of person she is ; then she gently asks him to speak the "former language" ; and, finally, she comes down on him (II. iv. 145) :

I know your virtue hath a license in't,  
Which seems a little fouler than it is,  
To pluck on others.

But Angelo is hardly himself being blinded by lust, and as if driven by a feeling of fatality he determines to take advantage of her helplessness. There is no need to feel chastely shocked when she says "More than our brother is our chastity" (II. iv. 185). She is Christian enough to view the failings of others with charity but she cannot, with eyes open, do something that she knows will stain her immortal soul.

In III. i, Isabella receives a second shock when her brother behaves as though he would like her to accept Angelo's bargain. He is abjectly afraid of death, and although he makes magnificent poetry out of his fear (III. i. 119), his words inflict a deep wound on the already wounded Isabella. She is aghast; she lashes at him as if without mercy, though the words really rise from the depths of her compunction:

O fie, fie, fie!

Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade.

Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd;

'Tis best that thou diest quickly.

An exasperated parent sometimes tells his son: "I wish you were dead rather than that you should live thus"; he doesn't of course mean it, and Isabella doesn't mean it too. The parent's words are meant to show his *anger*, not mean what they seem to mean; this is true of Isabella's outburst as well. Unlike many critics who fall foul of Isabella, H. N. Hudson finds the right words to say:

"... her harshness of reproof discovers the natural workings of a tender and deep affection, in an agony of disappointment at being urged, by one for whom she would die, to an act which she shrinks from with noble horror, and justly considers worse than death."<sup>60</sup>

(From this point onwards, the Duke takes control of the action. He comes out with his "advisings", suggests "plausible obedience", and presently proposes to Isabella the substitution of the one-time rejected Mariana for herself. In IV. i, the interview with Mariana of the moated grange proves satisfactory. There is in Isabella a streak of the "do-good-er", and it is when she finds that she can do a good turn to Mariana too (even as she can do a good turn to Claudio) that the 'image' of the plan

<sup>60</sup> Shakespeare: *His Life, Art, and Characters*, Vol. I (4th edn.), p. 409.

gains her content. On his part, Angelo decides both to eat the cake and still have it, to satisfy his lust and still go ahead with Claudio's execution (lest the inflamed young man should avenge the dishonour to his sister). This development is a third shock to Isabella, and after the first girlish outburst about plucking out Angelo's eyes she is ready enough to be guided by her betters. It is resolved that both she and Mariana should appeal to the returning Duke near the city gate.

Act V, with its single scene of 535 lines, has been described as a piece of manipulation, and also as "a consummately right and satisfying fulfilment of the essential design; marvellously adroit, with an adroitness that expresses, and derives from, the poet's sure human insight and his fineness of ethical and poetic sensibility".<sup>61</sup> Step by step the pieces are fitted in — the Duke's return, Isabella's complaint, Lucio's evidence, Mariana's complaint, the Duke's evidence as Friar Lodowick, Angelo's collapse — and the drama progresses from the many seemings towards the one truth. Isabella impeaches Angelo as the Devil, "an adulterous thief, an hypocrite, a virgin-violator", and asks of the Duke for the redress of her manifold wrongs. The Duke, however, prolongs her agony, by seeming to take Angelo's side; Mariana, when she prefers her complaint, fares no better. Of course it all comes out in the end. The Duke leaves the scene for a while to return almost immediately afterwards as Friar Lodowick, and when Lucio pulls off the Friar's hood, Angelo knows he cannot further brazen out his misdeeds. "O my dread Lord", he says addressing the Duke,

I should be guiltier than my guiltiness,  
To think I can be undiscernible,  
When I perceive your Grace, like pow'r divine,  
Hath look'd upon my passes. Then, good Prince,  
No longer session hold upon my shame,  
But let my trial be mine own confession;  
Immediate sentence then, and sequent death.  
Is all the grace I beg.

<sup>61</sup> F. R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit*, p. 169. Of the fifth acts of *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well*, W. W. Lawrence writes: "Psychologically the fifth acts are weak, dramatically they are effective... The last act of *Troilus and Cressida* affords a complete contrast; dramatically it is weak, psychologically it is strong". Yet all three conclusions were warranted by Shakespeare's 'sources'. (*Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*, p. 165).

The Duke has Angelo married off, on the spot as it were, to Mariana — but only to condemn him to death the next instant. Now Mariana supplicates to the Duke in her husband's favour, and begs — once, a second time, and a third time<sup>62</sup> — Isabella also to join her in her prayers to the Duke. At last her Christian ethic is sternly put to the test. But, then, her novitiate with the votaries of Saint Clare hasn't been in vain, and even though she is still under the impression that Angelo had brutally condemned her brother to death, Isabella says slowly and firmly (V. i. 442) :

Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd,  
As if my brother liv'd. I partly think  
A due sincerity govern'd his deeds  
Till he did look on me; since it is so,  
Let him not die. My brother had but justice.  
In that he did the thing for which he died.

It is her last speech, and fully in character. Her forgiveness is all the nobler because as yet she is unaware of the fact that her brother is not actually dead. She is the blessed feminine at its purest, the most unselfish, the holiest, snapped at the point where the human meets the divine.)

The Duke's role in the play is less clear than Isabella's. Hers is the radiant flame of feminine pity and Christian charity; she comes out of her cloister to the ways of everyday life, not to deny and destroy, but to affirm and fulfil. The Duke, on the contrary, symbolises masked Providence — and Providence is always masked. And, although masked, Providence is present always; and like Providence, the Duke is seemingly whimsical, not easily understandable, playful in a heavy way, cruel too sometimes, loving a practical joke, yet settling all things right in the end. As Friar Lodowick he says (V. i. 314) :

My business in this state  
Made me a looker-on here in Vienna.  
Where I have seen corruption boil and bubble  
Till it o'errun the stew: laws for all faults,  
But faults so countenanc'd that the strong statutes  
Stand like the forfeits in a barber's shop,  
As much in mock as mark.

<sup>62</sup> R. W. Chambers has brilliantly analysed this scene in his British Academy paper, *The Jacobean Shakespeare and 'Measure for Measure'*, 1937, now included in his *Man's Unconquerable Mind* (1939).

*Here in Vienna!* Not a flower-garden but a sewage-farm. To be able to lift the earth with a lever, Archimedes wanted to go out of the earth to a place *outside*. The Duke divests himself of power to see how power can corrupt the wrong man. Vienna of course is everywhere, and all the time, and hence there is a masked Duke—or Providence—too everywhere, and all the time. His ways are strange, and appear to us to be cruel or tortuously dilatory. But dare we hope to understand fully the workings of Providence? God is not mocked, and Providence is perpetually vigilant. Yet, another power too is needed to redeem the sad state of Man. The Grace of God, which is the feminine aspect of His omnipotent power, is also needed lest erring men be summarily destroyed by a Power that is not leavened by compassion. Redemption, not annihilation, is common humanity's daily need. Power without the freedom to forgive, to heal, and to redeem is but limited power, and as the power of Providence is unlimited, it includes the rescuing and saving power of Grace as well. It is Isabella's glorious destiny to remind the Duke of this auspicious aspect of his power. No one can have a greater horror of vice—especially that form of it which festers as sexual licence—than Isabella; yet it is her prerogative to plead on behalf of her brother before Angelo and on behalf of Angelo before the Duke. It is thus fitting that, on the human plane, she will wed the Duke, not masked Providence this time, but merely Duke Vincentio. Need we doubt that when love and charity wed power and strength there will arise out of the ruins of the present diseased world that is Vienna a new heaven and a new earth? In such a world, even a Barnardine can have a new chance in life and think of "better times to come".

## CHAPTER XII

# GREAT TRAGEDY

### I

## SHAKESPEARE ON TRAGEDY

The Tragedies are a vast continent, jungle-like in their complexity and range, with royal oaks reaching up to the sky, seductive but deceptive pools here and there, forest fires raging in immitigable fury, wild beasts roaming, tigers and lambs thrown together into the same incalculable scheme of life. The Tragedies resist easy generalisations, and refuse to fit into our neatly contrived systems. The surge and roar of the evil is obvious enough, but in the long run the forest fires exhaust themselves and are somehow put out. Evil is beaten back, and Truth, Goodness, Beauty and Love have a chance to prevail again. In the Tragedies, 'crime' is no diminutive measurable thing, like a stray revolver shot or a second's machine-gun fire, but an atomic explosion. The pressing of the button, no matter how trifling it may look, can explode a linked sequence of results whose end cannot easily be foreseen. Apart from the violence of the first explosion, there are the chain reactions, wave upon wave of widening destruction, that go on till the whole earth itself and the atmospheric envelope seem to be involved in the catastrophe. Claudius poisoning his brother in the orchard: Macbeth murdering his kinsman and King, his guest and his benefactor: Goneril and Regan driving their old father out to face the naked fury of the elements—they let loose forces of evil that can be brought under control only after incommensurable damage has already been accomplished. Even as under the conditions of modern total war no

distinction between military and non-military objectives can be maintained, so too once evil has been unleashed, it sweeps avalanche-like over all, the guilty and the innocent suffer alike, and the calm that concludes the tragedy is rather like the calm that follows a cyclone. The two avengers, Hamlet and Laertes, *are* reconciled in the end; Lear is reconciled to Cordelia, Othello recaptures the faith he had lost, Antony dies reconciled to his Cleopatra, — but all this happens just a little too late. In the Tragedies, then, the potency of evil and its seeming irresistibility are in terrible contrast to the apparent powerlessness of innocence and goodness. It is not a crime here and a crime there that daunt us, it is rather the diabolical native force or sweep of evil that throws up crimes right and left; it is the camouflaging of evil in terms of good, it is the blocking up of all ways of retreat and safety. Not poetic justice, only rough justice, is possible in the end; and "this justice operates like an avalanche or an echo in a closed space".<sup>1</sup>

'Shakespearian Tragedy': of what do we think first when we catch the words? Most of us are likely, were we subjected to the psycho-analytical word-association test, to spurt out 'Bradley'! Ever since Andrew S. Bradley, "the analyst, still unapproached, of Shakespearian tragedy",<sup>2</sup> said his say sixty years ago, all subsequent work on the subject seems to be no more than an interminable whispering gallery echoing (or contradicting) with varying intensity *his* intuitions and interpretations.<sup>3</sup> And today, whether we relish this fact or no, the critic and the great subject on which he exercised his penetrating intelligence and imaginative insight have become all but synonymous terms.

In his classic treatise, Bradley worked by resolved limitation, his one object being "dramatic appreciation"; he fixed his gaze on Shakespeare's four most famous tragedies — *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* — and sought to "increase our understanding and enjoyment of these works as dramas; to learn to apprehend the action and some of the personages of each with

<sup>1</sup> Clifford Leech, *Shakespeare's Tragedies* (1950), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon, *Shakespearian Comedy*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Maynard Mack begins his essay on 'The Jacobean Shakespeare' thus: "This chapter aims at being a modest supplement (I cannot too much stress the adjective) to A. C. Bradley's pioneering analysis . . ." (*Jacobean Theatre*, edited by J. R. Brown & Bernard Harris, 1960, p. 11).

a somewhat greater truth and intensity, so that they may assume in our imaginations a shape a little less unlike the shape they wore in the imagination of their creator".<sup>4</sup> Now 'tragedy', like any other form of literature, embodies imaginative experience of a certain intensity. It is easy to see, without quite subscribing to the 'personal heresy', that at one extremity the dramatist is himself convulsed by this experience; being both a sensitive human being and a dramatic artist, he translates his experience into a 'tragedy' and thus gives his experience a living body and a soul; and, at the other extreme end, the reader or the playgoer reads or sees the play and participates in the dramatist's experience. Not until the plays assume in our imaginations "the shape they wore in the imagination of their creator" can our appreciation of the plays be said to be complete or final.

For Chaucer, as we may gather from the Prologue to the *Monk's Tale*,

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie.  
As old bokes meken memorie,  
Of him that stood in greet prosperitee  
As is y-fallen out of heigh degree  
Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly.

Shakespeare has offered us no such formal 'definition'. Rossiter points out that, although the words *tragedy*, *tragic* and *tragic* appear 24 times in all in Shakespeare's plays, these are either in the earlier plays or are of a very casual nature.<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare, indeed, seems to have avoided the word in the mature tragedies — which may, perhaps, be taken as an indication that what he was trying to write was something different from what was usually taken for 'tragedy'. It is, of course, true that Shakespeare's view of Tragedy is implicit in his great tragedies, and Bradley has only tried to make explicit what is clearly implied in the plays themselves. Yet it is strange that while attempts have been made to seek in the Canon clues and ciphers to all sorts of mysteries — for example, to prove that it was Bacon or Oxford that really wrote the plays — we haven't tried to locate Shakespeare's answers (if any) to the cardinal questions relating to Tragedy:

<sup>4</sup> *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 1. Bradley's study of *Antony and Cleopatra* is included in his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (1909), and his essay on *Coriolanus* in *A Miscellany* (1929).

<sup>5</sup> *Angel with Horns*, p. 254 ff.



1. *The tragic world : what is it in appearance ?*
2. *The forces that rule the tragic world : what are they, of what kind are they ?*
3. *The tragic hero : what sort of person is he ?*
4. *What is the final impression that the tragic spectacle—the world, the forces that rule it, the hero who dominates it—leaves upon us ?*

If only we could get at Shakespeare's answers to these questions ! But supposing that Shakespeare has in fact given us his answers, where are the likeliest places they may be sought ? We shall certainly get no exhaustive expositions ; we should be satisfied with chance pregnant suggestions, pins of light that penetrate into the general obscurity, streaks of lightning that crash into the enveloping darkness. Doubtless Shakespeare would have put his revelatory *sutras* into the mouths of his great tragic heroes. It is there—if anywhere—that we have to seek the clues, and it is there that (with luck) we shall probably find them. What if Shakespeare has made his heroes give out the answers right at the time of their first appearance ?

Let us take our chance and open *Macbeth*. These are the hero's very first words (I. iii. 38) :

*No fair and foul a day I have not seen.*

Our first view of the tragic world cannot be better or more forcefully described. Already, in the very first scene, the Witches have declared in chorus :

Fair is foul, and foul is fair.

And here Macbeth, by a purposeful coincidence, echoes the idea. The day is foul, the day is fair. Contradictions confound us in this world, and we are a prey to a perpetual siege of contraries. From *Titus Andronicus* to *Coriolanus* we have a dozen or more tragedies, including *Richard II* and *Richard III* ; and what a world ! The Elsinore of *Hamlet*, the Cyprus of *Othello*, the Inverness of *Macbeth*, the Alexandria of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Heath and the Hovel in *King Lear*—what a world ! What passions spin it round, with what fury they “rumble their bellyful”, how they spit, fire, spout, rain ! King Lear's proposal to partition his Kingdom sends a thrill of horror through us, and for a second chronology abdicates its function, history and legend

mingle, the past invades the present, and we wonder whether it isn't the partition of India (or of Korea : or of Germany) that is being talked about. The whole earth seems to be gripped with frenzy and rocks like an unsteady storm-tossed vessel. What are the screams that we hear, these cries that pierce the heart, these curses that raise the Pit, these groans that batter our hearts and break down our defences? Thus Macbeth and Lady Macbeth (II. ii. 14):

I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?

I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.

Thus Lear, cursing his daughter, Goneril (I. iv. 278):

Into her womb convey sterility;

Dry up in her the organs of increase.

It is a sick world, a demented world, a world out of joint; it is a world where purblind men and women "enact Hell" in their midst and achieve a thwarted purposing, a world where good intentions fatally miscarry, where the Shadow ever falls between the impulse and the act, the flushed desire and the completed spasm, the long agony of fevered expectation and the wail and whimper of the crude reality. We are constantly caught between 'is' and 'is not', the natural and the unnatural, the terrestrial and the infernal. The Witches "look not like th' inhabitants o' the earth, and yet are on't". They are women, yet their beards forbid us to deem them such. Lady Macbeth advises her husband to "look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't". It is a day of victory for Duncan, but the victory is to be a prelude to his death. It is a day of rejoicing, but the "obscure bird" clamours the livelong night. Banquo thinks that (I. iii. 124)

The instruments of darkness tell us truths,

Win us with honest trifles, to betray's

In deepest consequence.

Macbeth is tantalised by the shot-silk pattern of evil and good, and thinks that the intervention by the Witches "cannot be ill; cannot be good". In *King Lear*, Cordelia is aghast at her sisters' perfidious hypocrisy, and achieves this unspoken thought (I. i. 75):

Then poor Cordelia!

And yet not so.

Poor and not poor! When Lear is in a towering rage, Kent taunts him with a paradox (I. i. 163):

Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow  
Upon the foul disease.

To the King of France, Cordelia — although disowned and disgraced by her father — is “most rich, being poor ;/Most choice, forsaken ; most lov’d, despis’d” (I. i. 250). Edmund gloats over his cunning strategy hoping that he the *base* shall nevertheless top the *legitimate* (I. ii. 20). “The prince of darkness”, says Edgar the bedlam beggar, “is a gentleman” (III. iv. 140). In *Othello*, Cassio is “a great arithmetician . . . a fellow almost damn’d in a fair wife” (I. i. 19). Iago swears by the “Divinity of hell” and plans to turn Desdemona’s virtue into pitch and “out of her own goodness make the net that shall enmesh them all” (II. iii. 339). In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the hero’s “captain’s heart . . . is become the bellows and the fan to cool a gipsy’s lust . . . The triple pillar of the world transform’d into a strumpet’s fool” (I. i. 6). Kingdoms are clay, and very falsehood is decked in excellence. Chameleonic Cleopatra is herself a whole world of splendid witchery and ceaseless fascination, swaying with her flawed magnificence the extremes of change ; in her the fair is lost in the foul, the foul is exceeded by the fair. And, out of the depths of his misanthropy, Timon invokes the reign of chaos itself (IV. i. 15) :

Piety and fear,  
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,  
Domestic awe, night-rest, and neighbourhood,  
Instruction, manners, mysteries, and trades,  
Degrees, observances, customs and laws,  
Decline to your confounding contraries  
And let confusion live.

Out of seeming good issues evil, out of seeming evil issues good ; fair *is* foul, and foul *is* fair. We sow generosity and reap ingratitude, we ‘divide’ in the interests of peace and prosperity, but the division only unleashes the dogs of war and spells general disaster. King Lear seeks to “shake all cares and business from our age, conferring them on younger strengths”, — with what result? The defection of Enobarbus only brings out Antony’s

magnanimity, which in turn shames the former into committing suicide. And so, in the tragic world, not only are the foul and fair present together, they also act on one another, and there are many reversible reactions between them. "Frail clay, nay but foul clay", said the poet Hopkins; and, likewise, Shakespeare seems to say, "foul clay, nay but fair clay". Such is the "heavenly mingle" of this tragic world.

Let us open *Antony and Cleopatra* and read on (I. i. 14):

*Cleo.* If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

*Ant.* There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.

*Cleo.* I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.

*Ant.* Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

In these four lines we have Shakespeare's answer to our second question. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, amorous love is lifted out of all imaginable limits, and it is this that rules the tragic world of the play. Love here is primordial Eros, illimitable, untameable, all-consuming, all-preserving; it sways the destinies of nations and empires, it swings the lovers between the extremes of pain and ecstasy. Love completely destroys them, love also finally rehabilitates them. There is more than mere 'brag' in Antony's dying declaration (IV. xv. 14):

Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony,

But Antony's hath triumph'd on itself.

Likewise Cleopatra too is transfigured by the power of love, and losing everything she also redeems everything (V. ii. 278):

Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have

Immortal longings in me . . . Husband, I come.

Now to that name my courage prove my title!

I am fire and air, my other elements

I give to baser life.

No bourn could be set to such love as Antony's or Cleopatra's; therein lay the glory of their life together, and therein also lay the springs of their tragedy.

Love, however, is not the whole of our 'inner' life. "Veneration, pity and the like are species of love", says C. S. Lewis; and like love, there are other forces — ambition, pride, jealousy, misanthropy — that also rule human lives, turning and twisting them to abnormal shapes. We do encounter these emo-

tions and passions in our everyday life, but in the tragic world these wax without hindrance, race without check, and rage without limit. No use advising Romeo and Juliet to love in moderation, or Macbeth to nurse ambition only within reason, or Othello to keep the green-eyed monster in restraint, or Timon to put curbs on his misanthropy; they are helpless, they are carried along by the heady current of the ruling passion that sweeps them to its estuary by its own irresistible momentum. As easily control this force as contain a Niagara or a Padma in all her native fury! This all-inclusive, all-consuming, all-preserving force may be called, after Masefield, the "tragic obsession"; or we may characterise this phenomenon of excess as the "tragic flaw" or "tragic error"—or, simply, the "tragic trait"; or we may equate this 'excess' with an uncommon unearthly intensity that is too violent, too uncompromising, too irrational to succeed *here*—so much the worse for this "unweeded garden"! Othello loved Desdemona, not moderately nor worldly-wisely, but too well, almost to the pitch of frenzy (III. iii. 91):

Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul  
But I do love thee; and when I love thee not  
Chaos is come again.

If love had meant less to him, if love had admitted of annulment or indifference or transfer, he would not, when Iago's shadow fell across his path, have thought in terms of despair and sacrificial murder. If only he could feel less and think more—but no! that were asking Othello to be somebody else. These tragic powers are what they are, and we must take them even as they are. Lear's obstinacy and Cordelia's righteousness, Regan's perfidy and Edmund's villainy, all are absolute forces that meet and clash at the infinite range of the tragic world. And so the sky lours, the earth trembles, and lightning and thunder bedevil the whole prospect.

What sort of person is he—the hero—who occupies the centre of the tragic world? Open *Hamlet*, and the answer stares us in the face (I. ii. 65):

*A little more than kin, and less than kind.*

These are the first words spoken by Hamlet, and they are a mere *aside*, as riddling a piece of speech as anywhere in the play. The

tragic hero is "a little more than kin" to us (as Hamlet is to Claudius); and he is also "less than *kind*"—in which *kind* means 'in the family', 'natural', or 'affectionate'. We recognise in the tragic hero something akin to a portrait of ourselves, but it is by no means a very flattering portrait. We recognise ourselves in a Hamlet—or an Othello—or an Antony—or even a Macbeth—and, now a thrill, and more often a shudder, passes through us. There (but for the grace of God) are we! After reading *The Egoist*, a young man is said to have rushed to Meredith with the cry: "Willoughby is *me*"; and the novelist added: "Yes, Willoughby is *all* of us!"

However, this sense of identity between the tragic hero and ourselves is a matter of slow growth, and we realise it more and more with the play's progress. To begin with, Lear is quite external to us, and his is an exotic world. Presently Lear's face darkens, his eyes glow with passion and rest resentfully upon Cordelia; we witness the issue being joined between the forces of Good and Evil—and, already, we are no mere passive spectators in the drama. With fear and trembling we follow the fortunes of Lear, we are shocked, we are scandalised, we are numbed by despair. As Lear's visible material props are taken away one after another,—as he is isolated more and more,—we too draw nearer and nearer to him. Lear now *knows* that Goneril and Regan are mere monsters, Albany but a milksop, and Cornwall but a creature of iniquity. He accordingly abandons the poisoned security offered by Goneril and Regan, and with none but the Fool to keep him company stumbles into the raging storm. To Kent's question "Where's the King?", the unnamed Gentleman returns this answer (III. i. 4):

Contending with the fretful elements;  
Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,  
Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,  
That things might change or cease; tears his white hair,  
Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,  
Catch in their fury, and make nothing of;  
Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn  
The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain.  
This night, wherein the cub-drawn bear would couch,  
The lion and the belly-pinched wolf  
Keep their fur dry, unbonneted he runs,  
And bids what will take all.

Lear's desolation is nearly complete, — nearly, but not quite ! It is complete only when, a little later, he casts off his garments, and baring himself to the fury of the elements loses his reason as well (III. iv. 33) :

Take physic, pomp ;  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou mayest shake the superflux to them,  
And show the heavens more just.

Again (III. iv. 102) :

Is man no more than this ? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha ! here's three on's are sophisticated ! Thou art the thing itself : unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings !

An old man of eighty — “ a very foolish fond old man, fourscore and upward, not an hour more or less ” — deprived of every support, bereft of his last “ lendings ” and even of his reason, such is the Lear who immortally stands his ground, dominates earth and sky, and is supremely himself — every inch a King ! And it is now we come closest to Lear, and we *are* Lear.

To digress for a moment. There is in Bijapur the magnificent tomb of Muhammad 'Adil Shah, popularly known as Gol Gumbaz, one of the great architectural wonders of the world. It is possible, when we are actually in Bijapur, to miss the significance of this giant dome. It is likely that one may almost ignore its presence. Even when you see it as you peep out of the railway compartment, although you cannot miss it, neither can you seize its vastness, its lone majesty, its splendid amplitude. The train leaves the Bijapur station and steams towards Jumna. By and by Bijapur and its monuments are blotted out, but Gol Gumbaz is still there, stretched across the horizon as it were, filling the sky and dominating the prospect. For a second or two, an intervening cluster of trees or a rising mound hides Gol Gumbaz from sight, but soon it floats again into view, it once more spans the earth and the sky, it is “ lone, limitless, nude, immune ”. Even when the train reaches Jumna (a distance of 10 miles from Bijapur), Gol Gumbaz is there still in the distance, and you are impervious to everything else — the surroundings,

the fellow-passengers, even the train's motion and your own separate existence. Gol Gumbaz indeed possesses you, you can no more get it out of you. Such is our experience with the great Shakespearian tragic heroes also.

"Tragedy", says C. Narayana Menon, "is a complicated arrangement of lenses having a simple focus, the hero". Not only is the hero progressively isolated from his companions, divorced from his material supports, but the isolation is carried out also in the realm of the spirit; his soul too is thus isolated and exposed, and it draws us towards it with an irresistible force. The lesser novelist or dramatist is content with describing the trivialities of small talk, tame action or formal social behaviour. But the great tragedian focusses attention on just those dynamic and purposive traits that determine the zig zag movements of a Hamlet's *mind* and the incommunicable disturbances in his *soul*. So isolated, so pinned down, so exposed to our gaze, Hamlet cannot escape us — Othello and Lear and Macbeth cannot escape us — and we too cannot escape them. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Ross and Angus, Roderigo and Lodovico, France and Burgandy, *these* recede into the distance, these fade away like Bijapur's trees and low-roofed buildings, but Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello and Lear loom immense against the sky, each a colossus in his own right, and each in some strangely inexplicable way a projection of ourselves. Richard B. Sewall has recently remarked :

"The tragic vision impels the man of action to fight against his destiny, kick against the pricks, and state his case before God or his fellows. It impels the artist, in his fictions, towards what Jaspers calls 'boundary situations', man at the limits of his sovereignty — Job on the ash-heap, Prometheus on the crag, Oedipus in his moment of self-discovery, Lear on the heath, Ahab on his quarter-deck".<sup>6</sup>

The 'error' or 'excess' or *hamartia* is nothing; it is nothing and explains nothing; but there is something *positive* in the behaviour of the tragic hero in his boundary predicament, and it is this that makes us admire him (in spite of everything: admire even an Othello, even a Macbeth), and lose ourselves in

<sup>6</sup> *The Vision of Tragedy* (1959), p. 5. Cf. Rossiter: "It is a manifest quality of Shakespearian tragedy that it visits us with such unknown fears, and in almost as high a degree as if the fates of imaginary characters were our own. All the tragedies deal with men and women caught in traps of circumstance..." (*Angel with Horns*, p. 260).



his isolation and desolation, his calamity and sublimity, his defeat and his victory.

Our last question : what is the *final* impression that this tragic spectacle leaves upon us ? Let us open *Othello*, and here is the hero's very first utterance (I. ii. 6) :

*'Tis better as it is.*

These five words convey to us, quite simply and yet categorically, the final impression that the spectacle of Shakespearian tragedy leaves upon us. Why should Iago have ensnared Othello's soul and body and brought about Desdemona's murder and the noble Moor's suicide ? Why should Lear and Cordelia have won their felicity — only to lose it so soon again ? Why had Hamlet to die at the very moment of his complete success ? Tragedy, in a sense, is a probation in Hell. Reading or witnessing a tragedy is thus experiencing the Medusa stare — one is terror-stricken, awed, and almost petrified ; and yet again one is somehow jerked into Heaven, one is transfigured and transformed. We follow the fortunes of the tragic hero, we wax and wane in response to the vicissitudes of his career ; and, the last support pulled down, the last battle fought, he lies in his last gasp, and there "cracks a noble heart". Perhaps, echoing Lear's last words, we too cry in our agitation (V. iii. 310) :

Do you see this ? Look on her. Look, her lips.  
Look there, look there !

Cordelia, dead or seeming dead, is the tragic world ; and Lear is Man contemplating the tragic spectacle. There is a spirit of rebellion, but presently we calm down. "The rest is silence", we manage to say ; and seeing it all with returning and restored faith, we articulate Othello's imperturbable answer, "*'Tis better as it is*".

A tragedy is, after all, a painful story. We are made to witness the spectacle of defeat and calamity and undeserved humiliation ; we are made to trail behind the vicissitudes of the struggle between two mighty opposites or opposing forces ; we are often made mute and impotent spectators of an even more exhausting 'inner struggle' between the opposing selves. The lacerations of a Hamlet, the frenzied jealousy of an Othello, the unutterable

anguish of a Desdemona, the hells Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have embraced with eyes open, these — so our commonsense tells us — are things *not* to be endured. And yet we endure them, we return to the plays again and again, we stand rooted in despair when Othello strikes his wife or Hamlet launches on his impeachment of his mother or Lady Macbeth chases the phantom blood-spot on her hand or as the eighty-year old Lear strips himself bare to the fury of the elements. These things are *not* to be endured, flesh and blood cannot stand them, . . . and yet we do endure them — *enjoy* them — and the flesh almost tingles with nervous response and the blood seems to course more wildly in our veins.

Here, then, is the paradox that we encounter in the world of tragedy. Wherein lies the 'value' of tragic suffering that the suffering — when presented as art — becomes enjoyable? In an article on 'Tragedy and History', F. McEachran gave part of the answer :

" . . . the end of the highest valuation is ruin for the man who values. And yet the spectacle of this ruin is so imposing and so convincing that the spectator is left with the conviction that he is face to face with the real meaning of the universe, so that in the end value and reality fall together as one idea. In other words, the tragic calamity is the real meaning of the world, and possibly the only meaning which it has, but in some way which cannot be explained, the experience of it, and the 'awe' (to use a semi-religious term) to which it gives rise, are the recompense and the high recompense, which the calamity renders in return ".<sup>7</sup>

It is not merely that a Shakespearian tragedy brings us face to face with a part of the essential meaning of the universe ; what is even more to the point is the fact that this confrontation thrills and excites us, it is both poison and nectar to us. Of what nature is Shakespeare's alchemy that he is able to make pain itself a pleasure, to transform a story of defeat into almost a hymn of transcendental triumph? A tragedy ought to make us rebel, return the ticket (in Ivan Karamazov's phrase) ; on the other hand, tragedy is no running away from life but rather a bold collision with life at its intensest and profoundest and fear-fullest, — a collision that is also a close embrace. The aesthetic

<sup>7</sup> *The Criterion*, July 1930.

experience of tragedy is of the order of *titiksha*, the confrontation, the mastering, and the beyonding of all the shocks of existence, and is very different from the familiar everyday feeling of *jugupsa*, the shrinking and slinking away. Desdemona, notwithstanding her dying 'lie', remains an angel of innocence: *splendide mendax et in omne virgo Nobilis aevum*. The 'murderer' Othello remains a Colossus still. Great tragedy, it has been said, is never depressing, for great tragedy is somehow an affirmation of the Everlasting Yea. The Crucifixion is no tragedy if it is realised that the Resurrection is the preordained sequel. Although in a Shakespearian tragedy there is no firm promise of such a sequel, there is in the catastrophe itself something of a direct affirmation of imperishable value — a sense of the illimitable and the eternal — a sense of absolute goodness, truth, valour, beauty, innocence, love — that we refuse to accept the defeat and the death at their face value. On the contrary, at the very moment when the boards crack and the discomfiture seems to be complete, we have the startling apprehension of the splendorous truth, *There shall be no more time!* It is the point of no return for these our tragic heroes and heroines, and upon such sacrifices as we have witnessed "the gods themselves throw incense". 'Tis better as it is.

## II

## OTHELLO, THE MOOR OF VENICE

*Othello*, like *Romeo and Juliet*, is a love story that ends with the death of the lovers. There is in both plays the same initial impression of terrific irresistible attraction between the lovers, the same sense of speed in movement, the same poignancy in the double tragedy. Strangers — and, besides, children of the two leading warring houses of Verona — Romeo and Juliet meet during a ball at night, get married the next day, and separate on the morning of the third day; Juliet is as one dead on the morning of the fourth day, and next morning both the lovers are dead. Four nights in all, and these comprise the sudden efflorescence of love, its consummation, the separation of the lovers,

and their reunion in death. In *Othello*, the very night Desdemona elopes with the Moor he is ordered to proceed to Cyprus; they reach Cyprus on a Saturday, the same evening Cassio is dismissed from the post of Lieutenant, and next morning he requests Desdemona to intercede on his behalf with her husband; the ground thus prepared, Iago corrupts Othello's imagination, and before sunrise on Monday both the lovers are dead. Two consecutive nights in Cyprus, preceded by a disturbed night at Venice, with a sea voyage and storm in between; and two lives, and the glorious fabric of their love, are wrecked. The night of marriage (and separation) in Venice is followed by the night of love's consummation in Cyprus, — and the next is the night of killing and suicide and reunion in death. But of course there are essential differences also between the two tragedies. Firstly, while the attraction between Romeo and Juliet is that of like to like, — youth to youth, beauty to beauty, ardour to ardour, — the attraction between the Moor and Desdemona is that of opposites — in age, in race, in colour. The love of Romeo and Juliet has to face only the artificially maintained tempo of family feud, but the love of the Moor and Desdemona is in defiance of reason, everyday experience, and all considerations of prudence, calculation or convenience. Secondly, whereas Romeo and Juliet die loving each other — they have only been physically, not emotionally, separated — Othello feels distanced from Desdemona though physically they are together, and it is only some minutes after killing her that the distance is bridged and there is reunion at least in death. Even in *Romeo and Juliet*, were it not for the sudden intrusion of Paris with his proposal for marriage, there is just the possibility of Romeo arranging for Juliet joining him at Mantua; unaware of what he is doing, it is the hapless Paris that unconsciously precipitates the tragedy. In *Othello*, the source of disturbance is Iago, who weaves a web of deceit in which the lovers are fatally caught and destroyed.

*Romeo and Juliet* is a painful tragedy, but far more painful — unbearably painful — is the tragedy of Othello and Desdemona. Like brother-murder (the theme of *Hamlet*), the murder of a wife on account of sexual jealousy also evokes reactions that are emotionally unendurable. Shakespeare took the 'fable' from Giraldi Cinthio, but used it in his own way. Cinthio's characters — except for 'Disdemona' — have no names: we have only the

Moor, the Ancient or Ensign (Iago), and the Captain (Cassio). The more important departures from Cinthio are these :

1. In Cinthio there is no elopement and secret marriage : the Moor openly marries Desdemona, though without the approval of her relations, and the couple live for quite a while in Venice in complete harmony and peace ; and when the Moor is appointed to command the garrison at Cyprus, she decides to accompany him notwithstanding the dangers of sea travel. In Shakespeare, the elopement and marriage provoke an explosion, almost a crisis in the state ; Brabantio's hostility is violent and brutal, and behind him there are—visibly or invisibly—Roderigo and Iago. Unsuspected the lovers come together and marry, but they are suddenly separated by the exigencies of the war. And if Desdemona follows Othello, it is largely because Brabantio's hostility makes it impossible for her to stay in Venice.

2. The Ancient steals Desdemona's handkerchief by sleight of hand while she is holding his little child : in Shakespeare, Desdemona drops the handkerchief being too preoccupied with Othello, and when Emilia, Iago's wife, picks it up he seizes it from her. Shakespeare thus partly shifts the responsibility from Iago to Emilia.

3. The Moor employs the Ancient to kill both the Captain and Desdemona—the latter with a stocking filled with sand, to make it appear like accidental death owing to the fall of some plaster from the ceiling. The Captain is only wounded, and is obliged to have recourse to a wooden leg. In Shakespeare, while the Moor leaves the killing of Cassio to Iago, the smothering of Desdemona is done by himself.

4. The Ancient persuades the Captain to accuse the Moor before the Signiory, and the Moor is therefore brought to Venice, tried, and banished. He is, however, soon liquidated by Desdemona's relations. The Ancient manages to escape punishment for a time, but is apprehended and receives due punishment for an entirely different crime,—in this his fate resembling that of the inhuman Popeye in Faulkner's *Sanctuary*.

5. The storm and the abortive sea-fight with the Turks are Shakespeare's additions ; and so are Roderigo, Lodovico, Gratiano and Montano. The Ancient's infant daughter is omitted, probably because there was none in Shakespeare's Company to play her part.

Accentuation at almost every point is the key to Shakespeare's handling of his material. The love of Othello and Desdemona is altogether more exceptional than in Cinthio : their life together is brief as lightning — there is the flash, the rumbling thunder, the overpowering darkness. Othello's character is greatly heightened, and so is Desdemona's ; Iago's is darkened still further, while Emilia's is touched up with more shade here and more light there. The attraction between Othello and Desdemona is largely on the imaginative plane. Othello himself says (I. iii. 167) :

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd ;  
And I lov'd her that she did pity them.

If we are to believe Othello, it is a case of awe and admiration on one side, fascination and gratitude on the other. Desdemona herself says a little later (I. iii. 250) :

My heart's subdu'd  
Even to the very quality of my lord :  
I saw Othello's visage in his mind.

Thus Desdemona has her dream-image of her lord and lover, and he cherishes his own image of the 'gentle' Desdemona. There is 'sacrifice' on both sides ; she has left her home, and is ready and eager to leave Venice and follow Othello to Cyprus, while he has his "unhoused free condition/Put into circumscription and confine" to be able to wed Desdemona. Not only have they both sacrificed what they are used to and have cherished so far, but their 'love' is also more an affair of the heart and soul than mere physical attraction. He tells the Duke, while asking permission to take Desdemona with him to Cyprus (I. iii. 261) :

Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not  
To please the palate of my appetite ;  
Not to comply with heat — the young affects  
In me defunct — and proper satisfaction ;  
But to be free and bounteous to her mind.

He is willing to leave the very night of his marriage for Cyprus, and Desdemona herself is to follow by another ship, Iago and Emilia accompanying her. So far, then, it is meant to be a marriage of true minds and imaginations, and the purely physical

aspect of marriage is at the most just taken for granted. It is the 'others'—Brabantio, Iago—that disagreeably harp upon that aspect of the matter.

It is nevertheless this extraordinary marriage that allows itself to be dragged into the mire and brutally destroyed. Although there are two sets of time-indications in the play, the main impression is one of speed: one has the feeling that Othello's and Desdemona's first night together is at Cyprus, and that is also the last. But why does Bianca (III. iv. 174) charge Cassio with keeping away for "seven days and nights"? Why does Othello declare (V. ii. 214) that Iago knows that Desdemona "hath the act of shame/A thousand times committed"? Might it be that the received text of *Othello* is in some material respects so mangled that it is impossible to straighten out the jumble of contradictory time-indications? There is also the ingenious hypothesis associated with the name of Christopher North: the simultaneous presence of both historical (or true) time and dramatic contracted time.<sup>8</sup> In the first *Arden* edition of the play, H. C. Hart amplified the point as follows:

"The fact seems to be that Shakespeare follows, on the one hand, the time occupied by the telling of the original story to the end, where he closes up its dilated conclusions into one grand climax, entirely his own conception. On the other hand, it is needful that these be compressed into a 'more continue time'; a necessity that none had a better dramatic knowledge to enable him to carry out than Shakespeare".<sup>9</sup>

A more recent view is that what Shakespeare attempts is to step out of Time and project pure Duration "in which Time is transcended"; and, as for *Othello*,

"The best way out of the difficulty is to take no account of time at all and to look upon the dramatic movement as a spiritual process in which different elements are fused into a unity. In *Othello*, there is, indeed, a Short Time as well as a Long Time but they cancel each other and are superseded by Duration".<sup>10</sup>

No explanation quite explains everything in the realm of art, and all that matters is that when the play is seen or read at a

<sup>8</sup> *Transactions of the New Shakespeare Society*, 1577-9. Appendix III, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Introduction, p. xxv.

<sup>10</sup> S. C. Sen Gupta, *The Whirligig of Time* (1961), pp. viii, 175-6.

stretch these discrepancies are hardly noticed, and one is only carried away by the current of the action and the heat generated by the tempestuous passions.

Thus our main impression is one of speed and precipitancy. The first night at Cyprus when Othello and Desdemona consummate their love and marriage is preceded by the dismissal of Cassio, the brawl, the storm at sea, and the 'stir' created by Brabantio (and Iago) at Venice. Sunday, the day following, is full of vicissitudes, but it is as though the coming events have already been shadowed before. When Iago works upon Othello in the so-called Temptation Scene (III. iii), how does it happen that he succeeds so quickly? The scene perhaps takes not more than 25 minutes to act, but Othello is sufficiently unsettled in his mind and inflamed in his imagination to feel that his occupation is gone and resolve that both Cassio and Desdemona should die. Some 300 lines after Iago's first significant remark ('Ha! I like not that') and 250 lines after his probing query ('Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady, / Know of your love?'), Othello is already *not* himself; he is already looking before and after (III. iii. 351):

O, now for ever  
Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!  
Farewell the plumed troops, and the big wars  
That makes ambition virtue! O, farewell  
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone

"The words are a death-knell", is H. C. Hart's apt comment on this passage:

"... as the memory of one conscious of the immediate approach of death, sets before his mental vision in rapid and distinct view an instantaneous picture of the main events of his previous life, so Othello leaps from the intolerable present into the happier retrospect of his past career. Othello's agony here cries halt! and ere he finally plunges into darkness, with his devil by his side, he takes a last lingering look at the light... So, too, Shakespeare's mind seems to tarry over this glorious speech".<sup>11</sup>

Another 125 lines, and Othello asks Iago to kill Cassio within "these three days", and he will himself devise "some swift means of death/For the fair devil". And Iago is nominated Lieutenant in the place of Cassio at the very moment his death and

<sup>11</sup> The *Arden* edition, p. 155.



that of Desdemona have been decided upon. Iago's triumph *seems to be almost complete*.

Iago's phenomenal 'triumph' has been accounted for (or explained away) in various ways. There is the view that Othello is the noble magnanimous hero, but, being pitted against the diabolic intellect of Iago—who, indeed, out-Satans Satan—Othello's defences easily give way, he becomes madly jealous and kills his wife. There is the view that Othello is not a personality, not a 'psychological entity' (Stoll's phrase), but is merely the typical figure of a gullible husband readily believing a calumniator.<sup>12</sup> Another view is that Othello's is really a jealous temperament,—otherwise Iago can have had no chance. An unusual view is that Othello's first night with Desdemona at Cyprus leaves him in a condition that makes it fatally easy for him to accept Iago's insinuations. We have, finally, the allegorical view :

"The core of the play is not this character or that but a love-relationship, and in this relationship passion and reason become suspicion and trust. Desdemona is trust and Othello is suspicion. . . Othello is the human soul as it strives to be and Iago is that which corrodes or subverts it from within".<sup>13</sup>

In a situation where we are baffled by a diversity of opinions, it is always salutary to consult Johnson, for his vigorous common-sense is unlikely to miss the essentials or stress the trivial :

"The fiery openness of Othello, magnanimous, artless, and credulous, boundless in his confidence, ardent in his affection, inflexible in his resolution, and obdurate in his revenge ; the cool malignity of Iago, silent in his resentment, subtle in his designs, and studious at once of his interest and his vengeance ; the soft simplicity of Desdemona, confident of merit, and conscious of innocence, her artless perseverance in her suit, and her slowness to suspect that can be suspected. . ."

So much for the three main characters. As for the problem of Othello's 'jealousy', everything hinges on the way we interpret the following lines (V. ii. 346)<sup>14</sup> :

Then must you speak  
Of one that lov'd not wisely, but too well ;  
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,  
Perplexed in the extreme.

<sup>12</sup> E. E. Stoll, *Othello* (1915), p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> J. I. M. Stewart, *Character and Motive in Shakespeare*, p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> See A. P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns*, p. 190.

Of the 2 meanings of the word 'jealous' — i.e. 'suspicious' and 'sexually jealous' — which is the sense implied in the above passage? Johnson's view is that, while we may not agree with Othello that he is 'a man not easily jealous', "yet we cannot but pity him when at last we find him 'perplexed in the extreme'". Actually, there is no reason why we shouldn't accept at its face-value (in either or both senses of the word) Othello's description of himself as "one not easily *jealous*". Not Othello alone, but Desdemona also, testifies to his innate freedom from jealousy. When Emilia interjects "Is he not jealous?", Desdemona answers (III. iv. 27) :

Who, he? I think the sun where he was born  
Drew all such humours from him.

After all, Othello sent Cassio often as a go-between *before* the marriage, and, immediately *after* the marriage, arranged that Iago (and Emilia) should escort Desdemona to Cyprus — neither of which a really jealous man, a dark middle-aged man in love with or married to a fair young wife, would have done. Since with eyes open Desdemona had chosen to marry him, Othello had no reason to fear that she was likely to be attracted to another merely because he was young or handsome. It is *after* the marriage that Brabantio makes the brutally cynical speech (I. iii. 292) :

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see :  
She has deceiv'd her father, and may thee.

There is of course no immediate response on Othello's part, but the evil seed is not lost, and it suddenly waxes into a Poison Tree when, in the Temptation Scene, after preparing the ground carefully, Iago amplifies Brabantio's warning (III. iii. 213) :

She that, so young, could give out such a seeming,  
To seal her father's eyes up close as oak —  
He thought 'twas witchcraft...  
Not to affect many proposed matches  
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,  
Whereto we see in all things nature tends —  
Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank,  
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural...

One aspect of the relationship — the purely physical or sensual — which Othello and Desdemona had alike played down, if not completely ignored, is now pointedly emphasised; and Othello remembers the previous night; and one way or another he feels confused, — or at least finds his old certainty sharply assailed. What Iago is aiming at in III. iii is to destroy Othello's pure Romantic imagination that has learned to see in Desdemona an angelic creature and to set up in its place a lurid sensual imagination that sees Desdemona as a deceitful wanton, grovelling in lust's excesses.<sup>15</sup> Othello's imagination is infected, and it now dwells more and more on the physical and sensual aspects of Desdemona's possible infidelity. By and by Othello can almost outdo Iago with his bestial grunts and growls, showing how lilies can fester far sooner than weeds. Wyndham Lewis remarks that, "of all the colossi, Othello is the most characteristic, because he is the simplest . . . led out to the slaughter on the Elizabethan stage just as the bull is thrust into the Spanish bull-ring".<sup>16</sup> Othello is the noble Lion so easily duped by the cunning Fox. Left to themselves, Othello and Desdemona might have made a success of their marriage, for Desdemona's love is an 'absolute', and Othello's has a like intensity too. In the so-called 'Brothel Scene' (IV. ii) itself we find them speaking the language of such absolute love. Thus Othello (to Desdemona) :

But there, where I have garner'd up my heart,  
Where either I must live or bear no life,  
The fountain from the which my current runs,  
Or else dries up — to be discarded thence !

And thus Desdemona (to Iago !) :

Here I kneel.  
If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,

<sup>15</sup> See H. Granville-Barker, *Prefaces*, Fourth Series (1945), pp. 40-1. Also W. H. Clemen : "Iago seeks to poison others with his images; he aims to implant in the minds of his victims a *conceit* which will gradually assume gigantic proportions" (*The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 122). Peter Quennell, again, has noted how Iago corrupts Othello's mind by first poisoning his poetic imagery : "Once this breach has been made . . . the sexual imagery in which Iago deals can find a way into Othello's speeches . . . Othello adopts Iago's style and, being the more imaginative man, allows his fancy yet more violent licence . . . Before he can destroy Desdemona physically, he must first destroy her in his own mind" (*Shakespeare: The Poet and His Background*, 1963, pp. 282-3, 286).

<sup>16</sup> *The Lion and the Fox* (1951 edition), p. 190.

Either in discourse or thought or actual deed,  
 Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense,  
 Delighted them in any other form...  
 Comfort forswear me !

But the world — Brabantio, Roderigo, and, of course, Iago — will not leave them alone. It is not that Iago is Satan or a demi-devil. But just as the red rag, in itself nothing, can still madden the bull, so also Iago's tricks of speech, his innuendoes and silences and iterations, in themselves no more than tricks, madden Othello, unsettle his mental balance, debase his imagination, estrange him from his best friend Cassio, and make him criminally misjudge Desdemona and "like the base Indian" throw a pearl away, "richer than all his tribe". The proof of Desdemona's 'guilt' is of course *not* 'mathematical', but that is really the whole point. Desdemona is *not* 'guilty', and hence there can be no 'proof' of her infidelity — and Iago only offers the *maya* of such proof. What Iago offers are 'psychological' proofs, to be capped by the 'handkerchief'; and Othello, 'perplexed in the extreme', succumbs to the *maya*. But the point worth noting is that, whereas Leontes needs no prompter, Othello needs the clever Iago to turn his faith into the frenzy of jealousy. To deny the essential nobility of the Moor, or to call it a mere pose or disguise, — or, again, to minimise Iago's role in seducing Othello to an ignoble course of action, — is simply to deny the plain evidence that stares us in the face.

The best way of understanding Shakespeare's intention would be to contrast the Moor in Giraldu Cinthio's tale with Othello. Cinthio's Moor is a cowardly killer and liar who is ultimately destroyed by Desdemona's relations. But Shakespeare's Othello is a simple as well as a noble character, who is driven to make a hideous caricature of himself by the *maya* that grips him, till he is enabled to pierce the illusion and recover at least a semblance of his old nobility — becoming once more the wizard who is master of the right resounding word and the timely decisive action. It is true we should not see Othello quite as he sees himself, for along with the nobility there are other facets as well; but, then, neither should we see Othello with Iago's cynical alacrity of spirit as the black ram or the Barbary horse, for it is only when Othello is under Iago's dominant influence that he nurses those horrible bestial images of Desdemona's sensuality —

noses, ears, and lips : goats and monkeys ! Rather must we see Othello (as Ophelia sees Hamlet) as the ruin of something great, like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh. More than all the harshness and violence that Hamlet displays in his behaviour towards Ophelia (in the Nunnery Scene) or Gertrude (in the Closet Scene), Othello now launches with concentrated fury on Desdemona. 'But there are also touches reminiscent of the noble loving Moor (IV. i. 178) :

O, the world hath not a sweeter creature ; she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks . . . so delicate with her needle, an admirable musician — O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear ! — of so high and plenteous wit and invention.

Even when under eclipse, the Sun will somehow let us infer its presence and potency ; so does Love. In V. ii, when Othello approaches with a light in his hand the bed on which Desdemona lies asleep, he is outwardly calm, but only (in Granville-Barker's words) "calm as water is when near to boiling, or the sea with a surge of storm beneath".<sup>17</sup> He thinks that he is a justiciar, a sacrificer, not a murderer. If in the first part of this unbearable scene he "regains a satanic semblance of the nobility that was his"<sup>18</sup>, in his final speech towards the end he fully recaptures all his lost nobility, and Cassio says simply, "he was great of heart". Are we to dismiss this return of nobility as mere self-dramatisation, — no more than "*superb coup de theatre*" ?<sup>19</sup> Most 'common' readers (and not a few uncommon critics) are stumped by characters so exceptional as Othello (or Hamlet, or Lear, or Macbeth). Failing to achieve the act of transcendence that enables us to identify ourselves imaginatively with the hero (in much the same way Catherine says in *Wuthering Heights* 'I am Heathcliff'), we can only raise pettifogging objections (Othello hasn't 'learnt through suffering' — hasn't got his first in the Tripos), and so explain away the power and the glory in terms of futility or failure. The Moor Shakes-

<sup>17</sup> *Prefaces, Fourth Series (Othello)*, p. 117.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>19</sup> F. R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit*, p. 152. Peter Alexander writes that Othello, far from spectacularly endeavouring to escape from reality, only hastens as he believes to judgment, giving "not merely his life but his salvation". (*Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies presented to F. P. Wilson*, 1959, p. 172.)

peare means us to see in the play is much closer to Bradley's Othello (or Othello's Othello) than the Minnesota Othello or the Cantabrigian Othello or Iago's Othello or the psychiatrist's Othello.

Just as, if we desire, we may set up against the 'noble' Othello the self-approving self-deceiving self-destroying Othello (the notion of Bridges, Eliot and F. R. Leavis), we may also, if we prefer, see in Desdemona no more than what the egregious Thomas Rymer saw in her. In his book, *The Tragedies of the Last Age* (1678), Rymer submitted *Othello* to a process of dissection under the microscope and concluded that the 'moral' of the fable was that maidens should not, without their parents' consent, run away with blackamoors, and that good wives should look well to their linen. Once again our difficulty is — shall we say — Emilia's initial difficulty. In *Othello* and *Desdemona* we are not dealing with average, but exceptional, human nature; in everyday life such love, such a marriage, such a sudden eruption of violence on one side and such angelic acceptance on the other, are hardly ever met with. But Shakespeare has transfigured the everyday familiar lie into a blazing blinding truth, "transmuted melodramatic accident into a universal idea of tragedy".<sup>20</sup> Else what is poetic tragedy for? Like Othello's essential nobility, Desdemona's innate sweetness and innocence and faith are the spiritual foundations on which the fabric of the play is reared. Othello's soul's perception of this true Desdemona is the spiritual reality which is, for a time, obscured by the *maya* of his newly aroused sensuality's revulsion against the newly imagined wanton in Desdemona. But the *maya* that is engineered by Iago is dispelled by Emilia in the end; and thus the love of Othello and Desdemona becomes the paradigm of the spiritual union of two noble souls which time and chance and the evil of the world may obscure or damage for a while but not destroy for ever. The just smothered Desdemona excuses Othello with her dying 'lie' and affirms her love with her dying breath; and Othello himself, rudely shaken by Emilia from his nightmare and inducted into the truth, executes on himself the 'penalty' for his crime *here*, while reaffirming his love in the act of dying (V. ii. 361):

I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee. No way but this —  
Killing my self, to die upon a kiss.

<sup>20</sup> H. B. Charlton, *Shakespearian Tragedy* (1949), p. 133.

It is the story of an extraordinary love wrecked by human ignorance, pettiness, and spite; yet so extraordinary indeed is this love that, like the Phoenix, it is somehow immortally alive, being the sort of love "which might well become an ever-fixed mark to look on tempests and be never shaken"<sup>21</sup> — a pole star or a dual sky-mark that can never stale nor fail to inspire.

As for Iago, whether or not his is a 'diabolic' intellect, he is sufficiently astute (and also lucky) to impose upon Roderigo, Cassio, Desdemona and (of course) Othello. A Hamlet might have seen through Iago in a minute, but with Othello he is safe. Yet the question remains: why does he seek the total ruin of 3 such persons as Othello, Desdemona and Cassio? If the motive is revenge, the ruin he accomplishes is far in excess of the causes he gives out. Just as Hamlet's soliloquies don't really explain his 'inaction', Iago's don't really explain his 'action'. Is it, then, motiveless malignity, as Coleridge posited? Is it born of the desire to "plume up his will in double-knavery", as Bradley surmised? Like the spiritual base of the love of Othello and Desdemona, the motivelessness of Iago is also essential to the scheme of the play, for it would be a mitigation of the tragedy to connect it with a villain who has an understandable motive. Theodore Spencer points out that Iago is compounded of 3 concepts of human nature: the concept of the difference between seeming and being (outer show and inner feet), the concept of the evil man as an arch-individualist, and the concept of the evil man as the incomplete man:

"Shakespeare's vision of evil probed very deep when he conceived Iago, for the frightening thing about Iago... is that from our point of view he represents the Renaissance ideal of the man whose reason controls his passions, and yet he is wholly bad."<sup>22</sup>

Reason is a helper, but even Reason is not enough! Iago's intellect, lacking as it does the embracing warmth of love, is merely the cunning of the fox and the slimy resourcefulness of the snake; what is unique in it is its motiveless operation. In his unfinished essay on *Othello*, Strachey elaborated this point:

"By an overwhelming effort of creation he (Shakespeare) summoned up out of the darkness a psychological portent... and endowed it with reality.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>22</sup> *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, p. 135.

He conceived of a monster, whose wickedness should lie far deeper than anything that could be explained by a motive — the very essence of whose being should express itself in the machinations of malignity... the underlying demonic impulsion would be manifest as the play developed, it would be seen to be no common affair of love and jealousy, but a tragedy conditioned by something purposeless, profound, and terrible; and, when the moment of revelation came, the horror that burst upon the hero would be as inexplicably awful as evil itself".<sup>23</sup>

Even Aaron wants to save his child from destruction; Edmund himself wants to save Cordelia if he could. But Iago has no heart, and hence no possible human 'motives' for his villainy. When Othello runs his sword at him, being a 'demi-devil' he bleeds but doesn't die (V. ii. 292).

If Iago's 'diabolic' achievement is the perversion (albeit temporary) of Othello's imagination, Desdemona's 'angelic' achievement is the transfiguration of Emilia. Compared to her prototype in Cinthio, Emilia is coarse, and vulgar, and rather unscrupulous. She picks up the handkerchief, and although in III. iv she sees that Othello is violently agitated and Desdemona is deeply distressed on account of the loss, Emilia says nothing. No doubt, she stoutly defends her mistress to Othello (IV. ii. 12ff), and later she seems to have more than a suspicion that Iago is in some way implicated in the developing tragedy (IV. ii. 140):

The Moor's abus'd by some outrageous knave,  
Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow.

But still she is silent about the handkerchief. In IV. iii, Desdemona's unflinching love —

my love doth so approve him  
That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns —  
.... — have grace and favour in them —

and utter helplessness are in contrast to Emilia's airy, noisy, reckless talk. Desdemona of course is wholly unaffected by Emilia's worldly wisdom, but is that all? Doesn't Desdemona effect unawares by the very quality of her absolute love a subtle change in Emilia? In the last scene, after Othello has smothered Desdemona, Emilia comes breaking in with the news of Roderigo's death. She finds that Desdemona is dying too, — "A

<sup>23</sup> *Literary Essays* (1948), pp. 29-30.



guiltless death I die"; and she can at once see, as in a flash, what has happened. Desdemona's dying declaration that she has killed herself cannot deceive Emilia, and Othello's affirmation " 'Twas I that kill'd her" is strictly superfluous. Emilia's fierce cry —

O, the more angel she,  
And you the blacker devil! —

at once puts Othello on the defensive and he mentions Iago's testimony. Three times she repeats 'My husband!', as if incredulous. Could it be that, although she had had her suspicions, she had never imagined that the mischief would encompass Desdemona's death as well? Emilia still desperately clings to the hope that Iago would belie Othello. But when he too corroborates Othello, something snaps within her and, if only for a second, she heaves with prophetic intensity (V. ii. 193):

Villainy, villainy, villainy!  
I think upon't. I think — I smell't. O villainy!  
I thought so then. I'll kill myself with grief.

*I thought so then* — when? At III. iii. 323, when Iago snatches the handkerchief from her and says, "Be not acknown on't: I have use for it"? She is now distraught with sorrow and anger — she ignores the company — she defies Iago — and, when Othello refers to the handkerchief, she realises the full extent of her husband's (and her own) involvement in the tragedy. As against her own husband, she deposes in favour of her late mistress:

She give it Cassio! No, alas, I found it,  
And I did give't my husband.

It is her death-warrant, for Iago kills her the next instant — but she is content to die by her mistress. Even as Desdemona earlier sang the Willow Song as if she had indeed a premonition of impending death, now Emilia too sings it with her dying breath; she will play the swan, and die in music; the willow, the emblem of sorrow, makes her one with her dead mistress, and the sad strains become a means of integrating Emilia's transformed character and the unfolding tragic catastrophe with the structure of the plot of the play. But how is it that Emilia has been

able to achieve this transformation? It is Desdemona's companionship that has effected this alchemy and made out of dust this immaculate gold of the ultimate sacrifice. Just as in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, Rebecca is at last converted to the Rosmer view of life, here Emilia too is at last converted to the Desdemona view of life. If Iago is the subtle serpent that perverts Othello for a time, Desdemona is the radiant angel who alchemises Emilia for ever. Take a long view, and all evil is mere folly. Wherein has Iago succeeded? His clever plans miscarry, after all; Othello is recalled, and Cassio is appointed Governor of Cyprus; the attempt to kill Cassio misfires, and Iago has desperately to try to foist the 'crime' on Bianca of all persons (V.i.85); Emilia herself betrays him, and he is covered with total discomfiture. As for Othello, he is at last reconciled to Cassio and completes the 'sacrifice' of Desdemona by now sacrificing himself as well. It is verily the apocalypse of Love: but such love, although it can show its face in our flawed Eden for an instant, can be truly consummated only in that other world which Iagos cannot reach and the play of chance cannot affect. In Kalidasa's *Abijnana Sakuntalam*, the Tragedy of the Lost Ring, having found each other at Kanva's hermitage and lost each other at the Court, the lovers — Sakuntala and Dushyanta — meet again, years later, at that 'other' hermitage, Maricha's, now to be united for ever. So too, in *Othello*, the Tragedy of the Lost Handkerchief, having found each other at Venice and lost each other at Cyprus, the lovers — Desdemona and Othello — pass out affirming undying love with their dying breaths, to be reunited for ever in Death's dream-kingdom.<sup>24</sup> Love like theirs must needs have imperishable value, even if on *this* side of life it should appear to be extinguished. Tragedy, after all, is poison — but also poison mixed with nectar; *amritam vishasamsrishtam*, as Valmiki makes Sita say on hearing Hanuman's account of Rama's fidelity and sorrow. The 'poison' so obvious, if the 'nectar' too weren't somehow implied, *Othello* wouldn't be the perfect tragedy that it undoubtedly is —

Death is now the phoenix's nest;  
And the turtle's loyal breast  
To eternity doth rest...

<sup>24</sup> The comparison between *Sakuntalam* and *Othello* has been elaborated by Prema Nandakumar in *The Indian P.E.N.* (February 1960), pp. 36-7.

## III

## KING LEAR

In *Hamlet*, brother-murder (also incest and usurpation); in *Othello*, wife-murder issuing from jealousy; now, in *King Lear*, filial ingratitude — the rebellion of children against their fathers. (In *Macbeth*, it will be regicide — killing one's King, a King who is also one's relation, benefactor and unsuspecting guest.) These are terrible crimes because they are so unnatural; all crime, even "in the best", is of course unnatural, but these are "most foul, strange, and unnatural". *King Lear* is particularly poignant because the horrors it invokes are at once individually unbearable and cumulatively overwhelming. Too many of the characters suffer in too many ways, and evil is not isolable as a single monster — a Claudius, an Iago — but is Hydra-headed: Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall, Oswald. There are not two 'mighty opposites' alone as in *Hamlet*, but whole armies of opposites, whole tiers of battle-fields, with confusion being confounded more and more, the issues being joined at every point, — Nature against man, man against man, man against himself, — and so all order within and without loosening, breaking up, and disintegrating into primal chaos. Gloucester's speech early in the play is a grim prophecy of the shapelessness of things to come (I. ii. 99):

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. . . nature finds itself scourg'd by the sequent effects: love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son and father. . . machinations, hollownness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves.

The worst possible things are promised, and yet the actual event improves upon the prophecy. "*Everything* is turned loose" says Theodore Spencer, and adds:

"Lear's own passions, the fury of the elements, the lustful desires of Regan and Goneril, all are horribly released from order. The chaos is more widespread, less local, than in *Hamlet*. . . more universal than in *Othello*".<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, p. 141.

The pressing of the button that unleashes all this nuclear-fission is King Lear's division of his kingdom between his two daughters, Goneril and Regan, and his exclusion of his third daughter, Cordelia, from the inheritance. As if one such holocaust were not enough, there is another also — Gloucester casting out his legitimate elder son, Edgar, in favour of the younger son, the bastard Edmund. Shakespeare took the Lear story from an old play, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, which was published only in 1605 but had been produced much earlier — perhaps in April 1594 at the Rose. Lear's division of his kingdom between Goneril and Regan, the French King's marriage to Cordelia, the cruelty of the elder daughters to Lear, his flight in the company of Perillus (=Kent), and the reunion between Lear and Cordelia — all these Shakespeare took over from the chronicle play, though he applied his own alchemy to them. The Lear story was also available to Shakespeare in narrative form — in prose as well as in verse — in Holinshed, in *The Faerie Queene* (II. x. 27-32), and in *The Mirror for Magistrates*. In the pre-Shakespearian versions, Cordelia and her husband (the French King) defeat Lear's enemies, and restore him to the throne. After his death two years later, he is succeeded by Cordelia who rules over Britain for five years. Presently her nephews (Goneril's and Regan's sons) rebel against her and take her prisoner, and to end her misery she commits suicide. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare telescopes Cordelia's two campaigns into one; losing this, she loses her life also. Lear's enemies are no doubt destroyed, but Cordelia dies too, and so does Lear. Shakespeare thus deliberately omits the two years of Lear's reign and five of Cordelia's as being of no account in the wider perspective of the Tragedy of Lear. Regan is poisoned, Goneril kills herself; and Lear has been reconciled to Cordelia. These alone matter. Cordelia's death by hanging, and Lear's death, after surviving all his three daughters by a few minutes, are but 'aftercourses' — for once the climactic moment has passed, seven minutes are as long as seven years, and Shakespeare preferred evidently to end his story with a bang rather than a whimper.

An interesting point that has recently been made by A. L. Rowse (*William Shakespeare*, pp. 378-9) is that Shakespeare may have taken over some features of a piece of contemporary history (as partly revealed in the *Salisbury MSS.* XV) in making

Lear mad, whereas in the old 'source' versions the King doesn't actually go mad. It appears that one Sir Brian Annesley, a gentleman-pensioner of Queen Elizabeth, also had three daughters, and was perhaps known to the dramatist himself. When the two elder daughters tried to get their father 'certified' as insane in order to obtain control of his estate, it was the youngest daughter Cordell who resisted their move and "considered that his services to the Queen 'deserved a better agnomination than at his last gasp to be recorded and registered a lunatic'". And so Lear fuses with Annesley to become Lear, and it is the youngest daughter, the 'good' Cordell-Cordelia, that 'redeems' him in his extremity.

For the Gloucester story, Shakespeare went to Sidney's *Arcadia* (II. 10). The Paphlagonian King, misled by his bastard son Plexirtus (=Edmund), orders the killing of his legitimate son, Leonatus (=Edgar), though he escapes death on account of the goodness of the 'assassins'. Soon Plexirtus puts out his father's eyes and throws him out of his seat, and so the blinded father and the injured son come together, and take refuge in a hollow rock :

"... the season being (as in the depth of winter) very cold, and as then sodainly growne to so extreme and foule a storme, that neuer any winter (I thinke) brought forth a fowler child : so that the Princes were euen compelled by the haile, that the pride of the winds blew into their faces..."

Here evidently we have not only the original of the Gloucester story but also the germs of the scenes on the Heath in *King Lear*.

Shakespeare took these two stories and teamed them together as the main plot and the parallel sub-plot. The theme of both is filial ingratitude, the rebellion of flesh against flesh, and blood against blood. Lear finds the right words for the horror shortly before he goes mad (III. iv. 14) :

Filial ingratitude !  
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand  
For lifting food to't ?

In both stories, the father-children relationship is progressively poisoned in terms of parental choler and perversity and unnatural filial rancour and hate. Goneril and Regan deceive their father through their fulsome flatteries : Lear casts out Cordelia : Goneril

and Regan move Lear to desperation and drive him into the storm : Cordelia (ultimately) applies the balm to Lear's wounds, and he becomes sane and whole again : Cordelia's death follows, and Lear dies in the ecstasy of the thought that Cordelia, but lately dead, is alive again. In the other story, Edmund the bastard deceives his father (Gloucester) through the forged letter and the stimulated scuffle with Edgar : Gloucester casts out Edgar : Edmund now double-crosses his father, and so his eyes are put out, and he is thrown out of his own castle : Edgar (ultimately) applies the balm to Gloucester's wounds, and he dies immediately after his reconciliation with the son he had wronged. By presenting the same cycle of events in the two plots, Shakespeare's aim was both to emphasise and diversify the chain of moral causation. In Wilson Knight's words, "the Gloucester theme throughout reflects and emphasises and exaggerates all the percurrent qualities of the Lear theme".<sup>26</sup> Not daughters alone, but sons too, do sometimes rebel against their fathers ; but not *all* daughters, nor *all* sons, are tainted with this vicious mole of nature. And again, not bastards only, but even legitimate children, could be so tainted — the more's the pity ! Filial ingratitude is certainly an ulcerous sore at the heart of nature, but then one mustn't generalise and say that all Nature is so tainted. The 'good' are as prominent as the 'bad', if not indeed more so, much more so.

With two such themes — themes so similar in their physiognomy — on his hand, Shakespeare had to face the problem of running or fusing them together to make an artistic unity. Having taken over Edmund (Plexirtus) from *Arcadia*, Shakespeare extended his role and accentuated his villainy. He defames Edgar to Gloucester, and betrays Gloucester to Cornwall, but the actual blinding of his father he leaves to Regan and her husband. He charms both Regan and Goneril, and thereby lights up their mutual jealousy. He leads the armies against the French, and after Lear and Cordelia are taken prisoners, he orders their secret execution. In Shakespeare's originals, it is the cruel children themselves that plan the killing or the mutilation of their fathers : in *King Lear* there is some tacit mutual adjustment — Cornwall and Regan taking the responsibility for the blinding of Gloucester (III. vii. 6ff) and Edmund ordering the death of his

<sup>26</sup> *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 188.

captives (V. i. 65ff and V. iii. 28ff). It is Edmund's role to augment the powers of evil (Goneril and Regan), divide them, drive them to their destruction, and then at last be destroyed himself.

Gloucester's fortunes run broadly parallel to Lear's, and sometimes significantly intersect them. It is from Gloucester's castle that Lear walks out into the storm and the blinded Earl is led out into the darkness. They meet in the course of their wanderings in Purgatory — the maddened Lear and the blinded Gloucester amplifying and completing each other's sufferings. With Lear mental suffering precedes physical suffering during the storm ; but with Gloucester, physical suffering (the blinding) precedes the agony of the realisation of the wrong he had done to Edgar. All roads in the play seem to lead to Dover — or the land's end — and Gloucester (thanks to Edgar) transcends his mood of despair and Lear (thanks to Cordelia) transcends his viperous thoughts of revenge. Both Edgar and Cordelia 'father' Gloucester and Lear before *they* are aware of the reunion, and both the fathers are vouchsafed their moments of blissful reconciliation with their children before death — one way or another — claims them at last.

Edgar is the third link between the two stories. He starts as the victim of his brother's intrigue, he undergoes a period of probation as the Bedlam Beggar, — though unrecognised, he is close to both Lear and Gloucester. — and by and by he gains in strength and stature. He saves his father from the assault of despair, he intercepts the letter from Goneril to Edmund, he kills Oswald, and he challenges and kills Edmund in open combat. The rule of disorder is inaugurated when Lear divests himself of power, and the return of order is promised when Edgar (Lear's god-son) seems willing to become King, not with unholy alacrity, but with a sense of duty and humility (V. iii. 323) :

The weight of this sad time we must obey ;  
 Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.  
 The oldest hath borne most ; we that are young  
 Shall never see so much nor live so long.

Thus all three characters in the sub-plot (Edmund, Gloucester, Edgar) are fully assimilated into the scheme of the main plot so much so the parallel lines come closer and closer and become

almost a single graph of the thwarted destinies of fathers and children. There is, besides, Kent. Expelled by Lear, he seeks service under him incognito, moves from Albany's place to Cornwall's, from Cornwall's to Gloucester's, and follows Lear into the storm; tells Gloucester about the hope of succour from France; this Gloucester confides to Edmund, who squeals it to Regan and Cornwall. Kent is thus almost everywhere, for in his philosophy there is hope as long as there is life (in Lear); and once his master is dead, Kent's role is ended too. He will not share the burden of sovereignty with Edgar (as suggested by Albany); rather will he follow Lear beyond death even as he has followed him loyally in life (V. iii. 321):

I have a journey, sir, shortly to go.  
My master calls me: I must not say no.

Like Kent, the Fool too — till he fades out after the storm-scenes — is very much Lear's shadow, and follows him almost everywhere. When he enters the hovel on the heath (III. iv. 27), he collides against Tom the Bedlam Beggar (disguised Edgar), and when all four meet — the Fool, Edgar, Lear and Gloucester — we have quite a seminar of fools (or would-be fools: Gloucester approaches madness only in IV. i & vi). As J. Isaacs has put it,

"It is not too much to say that *King Lear* is an arabesque of fools. . . It would be difficult to go beyond *King Lear* in complexity of fools. In Lear himself, who is mad, in his pendent professional fool, who becomes more foolish in his terror, Gloucester, who is on the verge of suicidal mania, and in Edgar the artificial fool, we have all four grades of genuine, professional, partial, and factitious fool".<sup>27</sup>

While Edgar is only Lear's god-son, the Fool is almost Lear's alter-ego, his conscience and his humaner self objectified and charged with trembling sensibility. The Fool is also a constant reminder of Cordelia, for his innocent unselfish love of her gives him the prerogative to represent her in her absence. In a recent essay, Huntington Brown has tried to show that the role of the Fool "comes to full fruition as Shakespeare conceived it only when played as a boy's part and by a boy actor".<sup>28</sup> And in

<sup>27</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism: 1919-35* (Ed. by Anne Bradby). p. 311.

<sup>28</sup> *Essays in Criticism* (XIII, 2: April 1963). p. 170.



Shakespeare's time, the same boy actor seems to have played both the parts of Cordelia and the Fool. By a curious feat of transcendence, the Fool is not only himself, but also Cordelia's image, Lear's soul, and Edgar's soul-mate. When mad Lear says, "We'll go to supper i' th' morning", the Fool promptly answers (his last words in the play): "And I'll go to bed at noon" (III. vi. 85). Although several annotations have been offered, Parrott's seems the most satisfying: "I've played my part and go to rest now, even though the action is but half completed".<sup>20</sup> With Lear asleep, the first tremendous wave of his passion subsides, and the rest of the redemptive process is entrusted to hands other than the Fool.

Paternal perversity and filial obliquity, vaunting criminality and proliferating 'folly', the criss-crossing of evil and good, injury and remedy, madness and sanity, these are the forces that spin both the Lear and Gloucester plots, knock them together, and mingle the broken fragments. But it is the storm that in an embrace of violence fuses the many into one. The rumbling thunder in Acts I and II leads up to the scene on the heath in Act III; and the confused sounds of the aftermath — now auspicious and reassuring, now ominous and frightening — are heard throughout Acts IV and V. The storm *is* the play. It sucks everything in and heaves it mangled to the surface to whirl about in the air. Cornwall and Regan shut themselves *in* to escape the storm, and advise Gloucester to do likewise (II. iv. 307):

Shut up your doors, my lord; 'tis a wild night.  
My Regan counsels well. Come out o' th' storm.

But there is no escape for *any* of them. While attempting to put out Gloucester's eyes, Cornwall is wounded (he dies presently) by one of his own servants. Regan and Goneril are both caught in the double gale of lustful desire for Edmund and mutual jealousy. Edmund rides with Goneril to Albany's place, and rides back again to Regan's. Oswald is knocked about, till Edgar gives the quietus to him with the words (IV. vi. 254):

I know thee well; a serviceable villain,  
As duteous to the vices of thy mistress  
As badness would desire.

<sup>20</sup> *Shakespearean Comedy*, p. 302.

Edmund himself, having deliberately strayed from the tried old paths of morality and decent human behaviour, is soon lost in the jungle of improvisation, and although the thought of both Goneril and Regan loving him is flattering to his vanity (V. i. 55) —

To both these sisters have I sworn my love ;  
Each jealous of the other, as the stung  
Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take ?  
Both ? one ? or neither ? —

it proves but dead sea-fruit in the end (V. iii. 240) :

The one the other poison'd for my sake,  
And after slew herself.

And all their vicious undertakings but light the way only to inimitable death. The guilty that thrust the innocent into the storm thus provoke their own storms and succumb to them.

And how about the innocent ? In the storm scene Lear is sufficiently percipient about the breaking of the worlds to expound to Kent the relativity of human suffering (III. iv. 6) :

Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm  
Invades us to the skin ; so 'tis to thee.  
But where the greater malady is fix'd,  
The lesser is scarce felt. Thou'dst shun a bear ;  
But if thy flight lay toward the roaring sea,  
Thou'dst meet the bear i' th' mouth. When the mind's free  
The body's delicate ; this tempest in my mind  
Doth from my senses take all feeling else,  
Save what beats there.

The 'tempest in the mind' rages fiercest in Lear, he is fully conscious of it, and presently he breaks under *its* strain rather than because of the violence of the outer storm. But this inner tempest doesn't spare Gloucester either (IV. i. 19) :

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes ;  
I stumbled when I saw.

Blindness, the storm's violence, the tempest within that drives him to thoughts of suicide are all of a piece. With Lear and with Gloucester alike there is but one out-topping thought, all else being strictly peripheral : that they should see and touch again,

and be forgiven, by the children they had wronged. Lear hardly dares to give open expression to the thought, for it is too much to hope; therefore he loses himself in thoughts of revenge on the two cruel daughters and their husbands (II. iv. 277; IV. vi. 187):

No, you unnatural hags,  
I will have such revenges on you both  
That all the world shall — I will do such things —  
What they are yet I know not; but they shall be  
The terrors of the earth...

And when I have stol'n upon these son-in-laws,  
Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

But Gloucester is more outspoken about his soul's prime need (IV. i. 22):

O dear son Edgar!  
The food of thy abused father's wrath!  
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,  
I'd say I had my eyes again.

And when the mad Lear and the blind Gloucester confront each other, their exchanges are edged with irony and touched with pathos. While Lear's heated imagination ("Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination"! ) denounces lechery and poisoned authority, blinded Gloucester has to *see* with his ears and his newly awakened imaginative perceptions. Then come these exchanges (IV. vi. 132):

*Gloucester.* O, let me kiss that hand!

*Lear.* Let it wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

*Gloucester.* O ruin'd piece of nature! This great world  
Shall so wear out to nought. Dost thou know me?

*Lear.* I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny  
at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll not love...

*Edgar (Aside).* I would not take this from report. It is,  
And my heart breaks at it.

The storm indeed rages almost all the time, now unseen, now seen and felt, now a rising squall, now no more than a dispersing hiss. In the opening scene itself, when Goneril and Regan bleat their flatteries, Cordelia fumes within but controls herself:

What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.

When Kent sees Lear galloping on a suicidal road, he suddenly lets discretion go (I. i. 144) —

Be Kent unmannerly  
When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?  
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak  
When power to flattery bows? —

and invites a storm of rebuff. But Cordelia's calm and Kent's storm are only the obverse and reverse of the developing situation. Water is calm before it boils. The sky is hushed before thunder shakes the earth.

*King Lear* is verily a universe thrown suddenly out of joint, the cosmos unaccountably reverting to temporary chaos. The abnormalities in human relationships are matched by the aberrations in Nature: but which are the causes, and which the consequences? Everything seems to be involved in the cataclysm: the worlds within and without, earth and sky, good and evil, gods and men. And yet, paradoxical as it may seem, it is nevertheless the storm — this dance of disorder and riot of disintegration — that envelops and sustains *King Lear* as the force of cohesion and unity. And Lear himself — his agonised all-comprehending consciousness — is the storm, both its enveloping fury and its centre of apprehension. In some simple and yet profound way, the storm is both the meaning and mystery of the Tragedy of *King Lear*.

If, then, the storm is both the circumference and centre of *King Lear*, how is the play to be presented on the stage? Lamb felt that the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted; and Bradley too has remarked that *King Lear* is too huge for the stage. Shakespeare's plays are the darlings of his imagination, and although he wrote them for the stage, he also knew that "the best in this kind are shadows". Isn't the Ghost in *Hamlet* too insubstantial for the stage? Aren't Puck and Ariel too diminutive — and the Witches too incredibly repulsive — for the stage? Isn't Desdemona's murder too heart-rending for realistic representation? The storm in *King Lear* is thus a problem only if it is meant to be realistically presented. But Shakespeare's fundamental equation is that Lear = the Storm, the storm raging *within* his heart being in fact more furious than the storm without. The storm sucks the people in, and Lear sucks the storm itself

in so that it may merge with the greater storm within. How, then, is the 'storm' to be presented on the stage? Here is Granville-Barker's answer :

"Lear, Kent and the rest must *act* the storm then; there is no other way. They must not lose themselves in its description... For the effect of the storm upon Lear is Shakespeare's true objective. So he has to give it magnitude without detracting for one precious moment during the crisis from Lear's own dramatic supremacy. And he solves this problem by making the actor impersonate Lear and the storm together, by identifying Lear's passion with the storm's".<sup>30</sup>

It is Shakespeare's imagination that equates the passion with the storm, and his poetry that galvanises the equation. We shouldn't look for realistic presentation but rather achieve imaginative identification with Lear, and so with his passion and the storm's; and it may be that a touch of the taste of Lear in our lives will help us best to understand him :

"It is perhaps only active men—sailors, miners, men who know deserts or jungles, soldiers and (when things go wrong enough) climbers—whose minds see to the bottom of Lear's 'Pour on; I will endure'".<sup>31</sup>

But of course there are (even apart from the storm) special difficulties with the play. *King Lear* is conceived quite obviously as a play that transcends time and locality. A Palace : a Castle : the open country ; a Heath ; a hovel ; an outhouse ; the country near Dover ! The stage is the whole world, and it is also the human heart ; and Lear is simply Everyman. Now the hands of the clock move fast, now time seems to stand still. Just when we feel exhausted having witnessed Lear's tribulations on the heath and a little relieved that he is being conveyed on a litter to Dover, a mere stage-direction—'Regan plucks his (Gloucester's) beard'—almost petrifies our eyes. Cornwall's blinding of Gloucester, which closely follows, is one of the peaks of infamy jutting out along with so many others, and had our blood not frozen before it ought to do so now. When Gloucester cries (III. vii. 68) —

He that will think to live till he be old.  
Give me some help ! — O cruel ! O you gods ? —

<sup>30</sup> *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, First Series, 1946, pp. 141-2.

<sup>31</sup> A. P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns*, p. 311.

Regan merely prods her husband to put out the other eye too. The horrible thing about this scene is that this blinding comes immediately after Gloucester's telling Regan the reason for conveying Lear to Dover (III. vii. 55) :

Because I would not see thy cruel nails  
Pluck out his poor old eyes ; nor thy fierce sister  
In his anointed flesh rash boarish fangs...

And his imagination is translated into lurid reality *on himself*, and so (in J. I. M. Stewart's words) "the blinding of Gloucester represents a sort of crystallising of this element of physical outrage which the imagery holds so massively in suspension throughout the play".<sup>32</sup> But from somewhere in the obscure bowels of the universe starts simultaneously the murmur of positive response to Gloucester's despairing cry to the gods : an unavailing response, it is true, yet a response all the same. It is Cornwall's *Servant* (like *Iago's wife*) that turns unexpectedly against the criminal. Like Emilia, the servant dies too — but he has struck a gallant blow, and Cornwall is a dead man. Like crime, compassion is contagious too, for the 2nd and 3rd Servants determine to continue the 1st Servant's good work. While one of them follows the blinded Earl to entrust him to the Bedlam Beggar (Edgar himself), the other says (III. vii. 105) :

I'll fetch some flax and white of eggs  
To apply to his bleeding face. Now heaven help him !

Is the blinding of Gloucester *necessary*? Isn't it too *painful*? And what is the point of the Dover Cliff scene? Isn't it something too farcical? Yet Shakespeare's artistic sense is almost always so infallible that it is wiser to look for a reason than castigate the scenes as excrescences. There is an obvious crudity and moral insensitiveness in Gloucester's speech when he discusses Edmund with Kent (I. i). With eyes open he nevertheless *sees* wrongly. Yet his loyalty to Lear is a noble and fearless trait, and he pays for it heavily, and this loyalty and consequent suffering ('martyrdom', L. C. Knights calls it<sup>33</sup>) pave the way for his spiritual rehabilitation. Although unseeing, he now *sees* the

<sup>32</sup> *Character and Motive in Shakespeare*, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> *Some Shakespearean Themes*, p. 108.

truth ; though unaware, he *feels* Edgar's healing touch. When the news of the blinding of Gloucester and of Cornwall's retributive death reaches Albany, he speaks words that echo (like the words of a Chorus) more than his own thoughts (IV. ii. 78) :

This shows you are above,  
You justiciers, that these our nether crimes  
So speedily can venge !

In IV. vi Edgar leads Gloucester as if to the cliff, and when the miserable old man "casts himself down", his cast-off son rushes to him changing his voice and tries to assure the dazed half-distracted man that he has survived by a miracle. The mood of desperation and the will to suicide are past. In a play so full of the clash of Appearance and Reality, the 'appearance' of divine intervention does good to Gloucester, and he can now say (IV. vi. 75) :

Henceforth I'll bear  
Affliction till it do cry out itself  
'Enough, enough' and die.

The man who said (IV. i. 37) —

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods —  
They kill us for their sport —

learns to feel reconciled to the worst buffets of life. Drawing an apt comparison between Gloucester and Oedipus, Harry Levin says : "As with Oedipus, blind and dying at Colonus, so with Gloucester at Dover. In each case, the passion of a patriarch has met with compassion on the part of a filial survivor, bc it Edgar or Antigone".<sup>34</sup> His supreme wish that he should *see* Edgar "in my touch" is granted sooner than he knows, and when he *knows* it too (V. iii. 196),

his flaw'd heart —  
Alack, too weak the conflict to support ! —  
'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief.  
Burst smilingly.

That is Gloucester's katharsis, and what can we say except mumble, 'Tis better as it is ?

<sup>34</sup> *More Talking of Shakespeare*, edited by John Garrett. p. 103.

Still the major questions remain : Why did Lear (how could he) act as he did in I. i? Even the opening of the original chronicle play is better motivated! In the *Ramayana*, King Dasaratha plans to instal Rama as the Yuvaraja. But the day of coronation proves to be the day of banishment for Rama, — Dasaratha soon dying of a broken heart. There is alas! grim irony at the heart of human calculation, and *King Lear* merely offers one more illustration of this. Lear thinks he is too old to carry further the burden of kingship (I. i. 36), and Regan tells him (II. iv. 144) :

O, sir, you are old ;  
Nature in you stands on the very verge  
Of her confine.

Yet this old man — fourscore and upward — survives *all* his daughters. An existing state of equilibrium is half-headedly doubly upset : first because of Lear's decision to divide his Kingdom between his 3 daughters, and second because of the last-minute change in his plans. The anxiety to cling on to power may precipitate disaster as much as the desire too hastily to relinquish power, and it is not the act of division alone but also the character of the actors involved in it that releases the springs of the tragedy. As regards the death of Cordelia and Lear, for a century and a half before 1823 (when Kean restored the Shakespearian ending) audiences in England were shown only Nahum Tate's version with a happy ending, with the addition of Edgar figuring as Cordelia's lover and husband. Were Tate, Johnson, Betterton, Garrick and Kemble, all wrong in preferring that happy ending to Shakespeare's own ending of the play? We are of course free to look upon the almost casual killing of Cordelia as the last twitch of the tragic thread — something to which we cannot reconcile ourselves. But what was Shakespeare's intention in deliberately making that twitch? When Lear and Cordelia are taken captive by Edmund, Cordelia says (V. iii. 3) :

We are not the first  
Who with the best meaning have incurr'd the worst...  
Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?



And Lear answers :

No, no, no, no ! Come, let's away to prison.  
 We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage ;  
 When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down  
 And ask of thee forgiveness ; so we'll live,  
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
 At gilded butterflies...<sup>35</sup>

Mere resentment and thoughts of revenge have been transcended, and only the mutuality of love purged of all taint remains. This is a great love, Cordelia's for Lear, Lear's for Cordelia. As D. G. James has noted, Shakespeare has of set purpose so minimised the role of sweetheart and wife in Cordelia that "it is her relation to her father which is alone relevant".<sup>36</sup> The possession of power, the cheap display of non-existent emotions, and the spectacular appurtenances of royalty (the 100 knights, for example) have no meaning any longer for Lear ; he has known the absolute of simple human love, which is also a daughter's love, and he is sublimely content and transcendently happy. Perhaps the whole point about Lear is that he is the father of all three—Goneril the 'mental monstrosity' (H. Somerville's phrase), Regan the heartless fiend,<sup>37</sup> and the angelic Cordelia. If *King Lear* were read as an allegory (as J. I. M. Stewart reads *Othello* as one), we might see in Lear's action in I. i a purblind impetuous violent rejection of the soul's translucent reality, and a suicidal embrace of the diabolic intellect of Goneril and the unbridled malice of Regan till—released from these monsters—he reawakens to the immaculate *sattwik* glory of Cordelia, his true self. The unity and identity once achieved, there is no more need for, and no more possibility of, prolonging the terrestrial drama. But even if this were a far-fetched explanation, it is surely clear that for a man like Lear who has suffered as he has,

<sup>35</sup> Middleton Murry's comment on this passage is significant : "By reason of the mutual disaster which is to engulf them, Lear and Cordelia are lifted up into the condition of *The Phoenix and the Turtle*. Lear's words : 'We too alone will sing like birds i' th' cage', contains a trembling mortal echo of their song, and Reason might chant over Cordelia the dirge it chanted over them".

<sup>36</sup> *The Dream of Learning*, pp. 100-1.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Stopford Brooke : "Regan is cruel for cruelty's pleasure ; Goneril is cruel more for policy than for pleasure. Both are cruel for a settled hate". (*Ten More Plays of Shakespeare*, p. 212.)

and had heard and seen the things he has (not the howls and claws of Goneril and Regan alone but also the roar of the hurricane, the rattling of the Fool's teeth, and the zero-hood of unaccommodated Tom the Bedlam Beggar), any further lease of life can have but a marginal value; it may even run risks worse than death itself. The supreme redemptive moment of his life is over, and it is his daughter Cordelia that had been the redeemer. In IV. vi, after Lear "fantastically dressed with weeds" makes his exit running, the Gentleman says:

A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch,  
Past speaking of in a king! Thou hast one daughter  
Who redeems nature from the general curse  
Which twain have brought her to.

On this M. D. H. Parker comments: "So — to write back the analogue of Cordelia into the Word of God — God becomes Man and therefore becomes part of the texture of metaphysical and moral consequence".<sup>38</sup> If in the storm scenes Lear enacts Hell and Purgatory, in the reconciliation scene (IV. vii) Cordelia (like Beatrice in Dante's poem) makes Lear's final redemption possible. First drugged sleep, then music, and last the balm of Cordelia's love — these together, and the last most of all — help to close the breach in Lear's "abused nature" and tune again his "untuned and jarring senses".<sup>39</sup> The scene of recognition and reconciliation is the very Everest of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry (IV. vii. 44):

*Cordelia.* How does my royal lord? How fares your Majesty?

*Lear.* You do me wrong to take me o' th' grave.  
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound  
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears  
Do scald like molten lead...

*Cordelia.* O, look upon me, Sir,  
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me  
No, sir, you must not kneel.

*Lear.* Pray, do not mock me:  
I am a very foolish fond old man,  
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;  
And, to deal plainly,

<sup>38</sup> *The Slave of Life: A Study of Shakespeare and the Idea of Justice* (1955), p. 217.

<sup>39</sup> See K. Muir, *Shakespeare Survey* 13 (1960), p. 38.

I fear I am not in my perfect mind...  
 For, as I am a man, I think this lady  
 To be my child Cordelia.

*Cordelia.* And so I am, I am.

Analysis (or even comment) can only make the passage bleed. After this climactic moment when Lear is redeemed and Cordelia has fulfilled her role as redeemer, the only possible end for her in this still 'unweeded garden' is death by hanging (a sort of crucifixion), with Lear both sorrowing on account of her death and suddenly—in a transfiguring moment—glimpsing her splendid immaculate resurrection, and so dying himself in a spasm of ecstatic felicity (V. iii. 309):<sup>40</sup>

Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir.  
 Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips.  
 Look there, look there!

(*He dies.*)

There are doubtless divers layers of meaning in *King Lear*, and as Hazlitt remarked, "all that we can say must fall short of the subject, or even what we ourselves conceive of it". At one level it is a political study that dramatises the consequences of creating a sudden power vacuum and filling it with evil agents and executors. Lecturing over 50 years ago at Madras, William Miller heavily underlined this political lesson in the context of Indian conditions. He compared the condition of Britain when Lear attempted to substitute "the reign of love at a single stroke, with the consequent preference of the pretence of love to the reality"—power passing into the hands of people like Cornwall, Edmund, Goneril and Regan—with the condition of the Commonwealth after the Civil War as described by Milton—"the failure of the Commonwealth and the lapse of England into the moral anarchy, the social degradation, and the political enslavement that came after it"; and from these two sets of circumstances he drew the conclusion that political India should avoid both the Scylla of 'too fast' and the Charybdis of 'too slow' (a warning that could be appreciated today better than in Miller's time since we have lately lived through the horrors of the mis-

<sup>40</sup> 'Pray you undo this button' recalls Desdemona's 'Prithee unpin me' to Emilia (*Othello*, IV. iii. 20) — both human touches that make the whole world kin to these great Shakespearian tragic characters.

guided Lear's-like 'partition' of 1947 and after).<sup>41</sup> At another level we can read *King Lear* as the tragic 'thesis' for which the comic 'antithesis' has been provided since by Barrie in his *The Admirable Crichton*. Lear and Lord Loam suddenly find that their material props have been taken away, and the 'reversal of fortune' is brought about by the protagonists themselves — Lear gives away his kingdom, Loam organises the 'return to Nature' on board a yacht which is wrecked near an uninhabited island. (Lear and Loam have each three daughters too!) On the other hand, whereas under the stress of misfortune Loam loses all the assurance of position and power, Lear will not bend, he remains a stupendous figure, and his undaunted spirit soars into the highest heavens.

Or, again, at still another level, a deeper and profounder one, we may seek the clue to the meaning of the play in certain paradoxes, the music of the storm, the wisdom of madness, the uses of adversity. Of the scene on the heath, Theodore Spencer writes :

"... we are in a world where comedy and tragedy are the same. The real madness of Lear, the assumed madness of Edgar, the half-madness of the Fool all play against one another to make out of chaos an almost incredible harmony. These scenes suggest the technique of music as well as the technique of drama, the use of dramatic orchestration so broad that it stretches our comprehension as no drama had stretched it before".<sup>42</sup>

In III. iv, after a speech by Edgar the stage-direction is '*Storm still*', and the following conversation ensues :

- Lear.* What, has his daughters brought him to this pass?  
 Could'st thou save nothing? Would'st thou give 'em all?  
*Fool.* Nay, he reserv'd a blanket, else we had all been sham'd  
*Lear.* Now all the plagues that in the pendulous air  
 Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!  
*Kent.* He hath no daughters, sir.  
*Lear.* Death, traitor. Nothing could have subdu'd nature  
 To such a lowness hut his unkind daughters,  
 Is it the fashion that discarded fathers  
 Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?  
 Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot  
 Those pelican daughters.

<sup>41</sup> *Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Natesan, Madras), pp. 57ff.

<sup>42</sup> *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, p. 151.

*Edgar.* Pillicock sat on Pillicock-hill.

Alow, alow, loo, loo !

*Fool.* This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen.

The music ranges over all three octaves, rational, sub-rational, supra-rational ; all creation is comprehended, all creatures are equal ; Nature is red in tooth and claw, human nature thrives upon lechery and cruelty ; man is " hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey " ; he is a " poor, bare, forked animal " — one of the 65 different animals mentioned in the course of the play. When Lear says " Off, off, you lendings ! Come, unbutton here ", he is wholly mad at last ; his mind has achieved release from the prison of our sophistication ; and this release — this entry into the realm of pure madness — makes him also wonderfully perceptive and greatly wise. Cassandra's madness was for her a punishment as well as the investiture of prophetic insight ; likewise Lear's madness is both purgation and illumination for him. In this focal point of the play, Lear (mad himself) has found part of the answer to the Psalmist's question : " What is man that Thou art mindful of him " ? A forked animal, no more. " But this is only ", says K. Muir, " an interim report on the human condition : it is not the answer provided by the play as a whole ".<sup>43</sup> The other part of the truth comes to Lear at the other focal point, the moment of reconciliation (" I think this *lady* / To be my *child* Cordelia ") when he recognises in the lady his child ; those " pelican daughters " signifying hate and cruelty give place to the " child Cordelia " who is the image of the Madonna of Love.<sup>44</sup> The storm was real, but this calm too is real.

Good, then, undoubtedly exists ; Love is no stranger to our ways ; and there are the ' justiciars ' above. Yet the old doubt lingers, the old grumble formulates itself again : Why must Shakespeare evoke so much horror, pile up Pelion on Ossa, the blinding of Gloucester on the top of Lear's passion ? J. I. M. Stewart sees the explanation in a letter of Keats to his brothers,

<sup>43</sup> The *New Arden* edition, p. liv.

<sup>44</sup> After Dante's 4 meanings, John F. Danby equates Cordelia with Griselda or Beatrice : " literally a woman ; allegorically the root of the individual and social sanity ; tropologically Charity ; anagogically the redemptive principle itself ". (*Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, 1962 Paperback, p. 125.)

comparing a picture of Benjamin West's ('Death on the Pale Horse') with Shakespeare's play :

"The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. Examine *King Lear*, and you will find this exemplified throughout ; but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness".

In a recent essay, D. G. James too quotes this passage, and comments illuminatingly as follows :

"Now I take Keats as saying, when he speaks of the disappearance of what is disagreeable in the play, that, as the play advances and comes to its end, it is upon the great spiritual beauty of some of the characters, upon the scene in which Lear dies over Cordelia's body, that our minds are concentrated . . . the repulsiveness of Regan is overcome by the beauty of Cordelia and falls away from our minds. The beauty that we behold in Cordelia, Edgar, Kent, Lear, is tragic and sorrowful ; but it is the greater for that ; it is this beauty, intensified indeed by sorrow, which obliterates every other consideration ; it draws to itself all our attention and speculation".<sup>45</sup>

It is only when one loses oneself in such a "momentous depth of speculation" that one apprehends the meaning of *King Lear* in relation, first, to the dire Gospel prophecy —

"And brother shall deliver up brother to death, and the father his child : and children shall rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death" ; —

then, to the pessimism of Gloucester's —

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods —  
They kill us for their sport ;

and, finally, to the cleansing and transfiguring power of human love, the love that at last floods the parched souls of Gloucester and Lear and gives them the strength and the wisdom to defeat the Nay and affirm the Everlasting Yea (V. iii. 16) —

And take upon's the mystery of things  
As if we were God's spies.

In his recent study of *King Lear*, Russell A. Fraser sees in the play the mingling and integration of many motifs : "the idea

<sup>45</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 13, p. 62.

of Providence ; of Kind ; of Anarchy and Order ; and Reason and Will ; and Show against Substance ; and Redemption ".<sup>46</sup> But the ' poetics ' inferred from *King Lear* is seen also to have a more general application :

" The metaphors of Providence and Order, in the earliest plays as in the latest, infer the relation that is to obtain between man and the universe, and man and society. The war of Reason and Will, the fierce dispute, in Keats's phrase, betwixt damnation and impassioned clay, dramatises the fragility of that relation and the tension to which it is subjected. Kind denotes the internal sanctions that enforce it. To treat of Anarchy or Fortune is to represent what happens when those sanctions are ignored and the relation is disputed. To suggest that the ignorant man invokes his own destruction is to say that he repudiates Substance for Show. To explore the theme of Redemption is to illuminate the means by which his mistake may be recovered ".<sup>47</sup>

The same ' values ' — devotion, love, courage, charity, loyalty — are affirmed in comedies and tragedies alike, but whereas the comic dramatist (himself the *deus ex machina* of the play) " is ready at any moment to nip a desperate situation before it can proceed to disaster " and so ensure a ' happy ' ending, the tragic dramatist lets the action " run on to its logical close ", thereby making the hero or heroine suffer all things, endure all things, — yet also ultimately ' beyond ' the rivers of tribulation and failure.<sup>48</sup> Again John F. Danby sees *King Lear* " as a play dramatising the meanings of the single word ' Nature ' "; and the words ' nature ', ' natural ', and ' unnatural ' seem to occur over 40 times in the play, as against 28 in *Macbeth* and 25 in *Timon*.<sup>49</sup> There is ' benignant ' Nature pitted against ' malignant ' Nature, — Lear against his wicked daughters, Gloucester against his unnatural son. Just as Nature is perverted, Reason is often perverted too ; and the whole community, the cosmos itself, is also torn in two. The movement away from ' providential order ' and ' benignant Nature ' comes as a sudden convulsion, a darkening or corruption of the consciousness ; and the return and restoration are brought about, after incalculable suffering and loss, through the ineluctable play of Grace. The world that the sufferings of Gloucester and Lear and the ' goodness ' of Kent, Edgar, Cordelia, and the Fool

<sup>46</sup> *Shakespeare's Poetics in relation to ' King Lear '* (1962), p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 138-9.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 166-7.

<sup>49</sup> *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, pp. 15, 10.

bring into being is a transcendent society "in which Lear's regeneration and Cordelia's truth might be completed: a Utopia and a New Jerusalem".<sup>50</sup> The paradox of the human predicament is that, from time to time, select men and women have to bear the burden of the suffering and the defeat so that a better world may be possible. It is the destiny of these characters to incarnate the whole plight of Man in the Cosmos, caught between agonising actuality and transcendent Possibility. As Arthur Sewall points out, "the tragic characters are, indeed, called upon . . . to refashion themselves, to reframe the universe, out of Chaos"; and, as the action is played both on a temporal and on a metaphysical frame of reference, "there is terror for that which is out of time, and pity for that which is in time, and they make a single experience".<sup>51</sup> A sudden invasion of darkness and projection into Hell is followed by a probation of purgatorial progress guided by the light of increasing self-knowledge, till at last Felicity itself is glimpsed as ambrosial immaculate Love.

In the wake of Shakespeare's Lear, there have been other 'Lears' too — Balzac's Lear, for example, the old, weak, ineffectual Pere Goriot. A closer approximation is Turgenev's Martin Petrovitch Harlov of *A Lear of the Steppes*. This Lear is "a man of gigantic stature . . . what fingers, what feet . . . he breathed slowly and heavily like a bull . . . a strength truly Herculean". There are only 2 daughters here, Anna married to Sletkin, and the unmarried Evlampia. Against the advice of his friend Natalia (a composite of Kent and Cordelia), Harlov gifts away his property to his daughters, leaving himself only a room, 'normal provisions', a monthly allowance of 10 roubles, a page, and a horse. The 'inevitable' happens. Sletkin proceeds to break Harlov's proud spirit, and wife and sister-in-law — now his mistress — buoy him up in his diabolical enterprise. Harlov's being ejected from his room is the last straw. He rushes to Natalia and is received by her with understanding and sympathy. But presently inflamed by the demented Souvenir's insults, Harlov is of a sudden transformed into a destructive force. "I shall tear the roof off them", he says, "and they shall have no roof over their heads, like me". And so the impossible is enacted before our eyes. Like the White Whale rocking the *Pequod* and send-

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> *Character and Society in Shakespeare* (1951), pp. 86, 90



ing it to the bottom, like Samson shaking the pillar and bringing the entire edifice down, Harlov too charges against his own house, stands on its roof, and starts pulling it to pieces. A crowd gathers, and son-in-law and daughters helplessly rave and run about, and there Harlov stands, bleeding and terrible and immense, and the last chimney too comes down with a crash. Evlampia's conscience stirs a little, and she begs, and she prays for forgiveness, and she speaks in a caressing and agonised voice. But Harlov imperturbably answers: "Too late . . . the rock's started down-hill — there's no holding it back now". And he pulls down with his superhuman strength the top central beam of the roof and dies crushed under it. And this reincarnated Samson, this Lear of the Steppes, passes away appropriately at the very moment of his revenge and self-rehabilitation. Of course, Turgenev's tale is no tragedy in five acts but merely a novel in which realism and poetry mingle to form a work of art. Harlov is dead, Anna poisons her husband and lives to be the efficient manager of the Harlov property, while Evlampia organises the Order of the flagellant dissenters, ruling with an iron hand thousands of 'Mothers of God'! Turgenev's Lear is no mimicry of Shakespeare's hero but a man in his own right, a Lear not so much in the details of his life as in his unbending spirit and enormity of suffering. But all these other Lears in literature (and life) only serve to send us back to Shakespeare's play and re-enact yet once more the Passion, — all the terror and the pity, and the terror at last transcended as pity and love.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> I find that Peter Quennell also (*Shakespeare: The Poet and His Background*, pp. 305-6) refers to Turgenev's story, but my article 'Turgenev's Lear', on which the above paragraph is based, appeared in *The New Democrat* of 13 February 1948.

CHAPTER XIII  
LATER TRAGEDY

1

*TIMON OF ATHENS*

*Timon of Athens* has obvious points of similarity with *King Lear*. Both seem to hinge on the theme of ingratitude. As Lear is deceived in his two elder daughters, so Timon is deceived in his demonstrative friends. Ingratitude drives Lear to the open heath, where he is caught in a storm; denied by his former friends, Timon moves out of Athens, and seeks refuge in a cave. Meeting the Bedlam Beggar, Lear realises what a poor animal unaccommodated man is, and casts away his own 'lendings'; in his adversity Timon too achieves total bareness, avoiding all surplusage, and dwindling into a bare forked creature. Lear's first furious spasm spends itself out in the curses he hurls on Goneril (I. iv. 275ff); Timon's first words (IV. i) outside the walls of Athens are a string of revolting curses on the city and its inhabitants. Lear in his madness is especially vehement against lechery, although his vehemence takes the form of inverted benediction (IV. vi. 111ff); Timon too talks with sardonic edge about lechery and whoredom to Phrynia and Timandra (IV. iii. 82; 139):

Be a whore still; they love thee not that use thee.  
Give them diseases, leaving with thee their lust.  
Make use of thy salt hours ...

Be whores still;  
And he whose pious breath seeks to convert you—  
Be strong in whore, allure him, burn him up ...

But whereas we have the feeling that even in his worst extravagances Lear is 'more sinned against than sinning', Timon's aberrations — both during the days of his affluence and the days of his self-exile — seem to be imperfectly motivated. In fact, some of Timon's later speeches seem to be furious exercises or exhibitions of purgation on Shakespeare's own part rather than integral to the developing action of the play. Comparing *Timon* with *Measure for Measure*, Theodore Spencer says that we feel like protesting 'Life is not like that' — "of *Timon* because we feel that *Timon* expounds a preposterous evil, whereas *Measure for Measure* creates an impossible good".<sup>1</sup> The deflection of friends in *Timon* is not, after all, quite on a footing with lilyal ingratitude in *King Lear*; and Goneril, Regan, Cornwall and Edmund are more fiercely positive in their propensity to evil than Timon's sycophants — Lucius, Lucullus, Sempronius and Ventidius — who fall away from him when his worldly fortunes fail. Timon's uncompromising misanthropy and the envenomed point it gives to his actions and speech (especially the latter) appear to be far in excess of the needs of the situation. But, then, this is only our commonsense point of view. The clue to Timon's character is that he must necessarily veer between extremes, either be generous beyond measure or be censorious in excess. Apemantus' words (IV. iii. 299) —

The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends. When thou wast in thy gilt and thy perfume, they mock'd thee for too much curiosity; in thy rags thou know'st none, but art despis'd for the contrary —

are strictly true. "Timon's 'fault' is essential love, essential nobility, unmixed with any restraining faculty of criticism", says G. Wilson Knight;<sup>2</sup> and when the crash comes, as Timon's love had been universal, "now his hate is universal, its theme embraces every grade, age, sex, and profession. He hates the very shape, the 'semblance' of man".<sup>3</sup> Had Timon listened to his steward Flavius' words of caution, he could have avoided the financial crash; even after the disaster, if only he would listen to Flavius' voice of reason, Timon could still outface the winter of

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 243.

his adversity. But if he could do either, he wouldn't be Timon. "There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd": and there's beggary even in the hate that can be reckon'd! In *King Lear*, the contrast is between the fiendish cruelty of Goneril and Regan and Cornwall on the one hand, and the solicitude, attachment and love of Kent, the Fool and Cordelia: and the great swing is from the elder daughter's hate to the third daughter's love. In *Timon*, the contrast is between the sophisticated flatteries of the sycophants and the simple loyalties of the servants, the cool calculation of the Senators and the sturdy manliness of the soldier, Alcibiades; and the sudden and violent swing is from indiscriminate benevolence towards all and sundry to uncritical hatred of everything and everybody. The Katharsis that ennobles *King Lear* and reconciles us to its tragic ending is lacking in *Timon*, for what we witness is only a sharp contrast, not a cycle of change with the hero lurching from thesis to anti-thesis and accomplishing some sort of recovery or psychic rehabilitation.<sup>4</sup> As Donald A. Stauffer says, "the end of *Timon* is only death, whereas the end of tragedy is the transcending of death in the discovery of truth".<sup>5</sup> There is visible poison in abundance without the promise of the nectar to come.

The Alcibiades sub-plot, which also turns on ingratitude, besides being a first sketch of the tragedy of Coriolanus, bears to the Timon story the same relation that the Gloucester story has to the tragedy of Lear. But whereas both Lear and Gloucester, having (like Timon) purblindly caused their own misery, try to work out their salvation through patient suffering ("I'll forbear", "I can be patient", "No, I will be the pattern of all patience", says Lear, though he can be impetuous too; and after the Dover-Cliff episode, Edgar tells Gloucester, "Bear free and patient thoughts"), and the blinding of Gloucester and the hanging of Cordelia are alike akin to the crucifixion that makes martyrs of them both for their great love of Lear, — in *Timon of Athens*, on the other hand, both the protagonists fight back, each deploying the utmost resources he can command. While Alcibiades would have Athens destroyed with his arms, Timon with his curses wishes that the city were indeed so destroyed. The in-

<sup>4</sup> See Maynard Mack in *Jacobean Shakespeare* (Ed. by J. R. Brown and B. Harris), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare's World of Images* (1949), p. 231.

gratitude of the Athenian senators towards Alcibiades — they will not condone the murder, done under provocation, by one of his soldiers, and besides they banish Alcibiades for his forceful pleading on behalf of his soldier (III. v) — is collective meanness and vulgar show of power, but falls far short of the calculating brutality of Regan and Cornwall. Timon's disillusion is caused by sundry individuals refusing to honour the simple demands of friendship, and the vials of his wrath are poured on *all* humanity, Flavius being the solitary exception, rather reluctantly conceded (IV. iii. 496) :

I do proclaim  
One honest man — mistake me not, but one ;  
No more, I pray — and he's a steward.

For the rest, however, only curses ; “ I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind ” (IV. iii. 52) ; earth itself is “ thou common whore of mankind ” (IV. iii. 42) ; and the commonwealth of Athens is but a forest of beasts ! Down with everything ! Alcibiades' disillusion is occasioned by the Senate (no doubt made up of individuals who have thrived on permits, licences and war contracts, while Alcibiades has been fighting their wars) ignoring his pleas and adding injury to insult by banishing him ; and his revenge takes the form of his marching against Athens, resolved to destroy it (as Coriolanus, banished from Rome, returns with the determination to bring her to her knees). Timon's misanthropy is so absolute that he will not respond even to Alcibiades' friendship : but seeing in him a means of realising the destruction of Athens, Timon gives the soldier a part of his new-found gold, even as he gives gold to Phrynia and Timandra exhorting them to sow consumptions “ in hollow bones of man ”. To Alcibiades, Timon's words are (IV. iii. 108) :

Be as a planetary plague, when Jove  
Will o'er some high-vic'd city hang his poison  
In the sick air ; let not thy sword skip one.  
Pity not honour'd age for his white beard :  
He is an usurer. Strike me the counterfeit matron ...

There's gold to pay thy soldiers.  
Make large confusion ; and, thy fury spent.  
Confounded be thyself.

Obviously this man is not quite sane. Alcibiades sees this when he tells Timandra that Timon's "wits are drown'd and lost in his calamities". But this madness, even as it is a form of punishment to him, also makes him exceptionally percipient, though this too is one-sided to the point of caricature. He becomes suddenly eloquent about gold (IV. iii. 28) :

Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair,  
Wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant.  
Ha, you gods ! why this ? What, this, you gods ? Why, this  
Will lug your priests and servants from your sides,  
Pluck stout men's pillows from below their heads—  
This yellow slave  
Will knit and break religions, bless th' accurs'd,  
Make the hoar leprosy ador'd, place thieves  
And give them title, knee, and approbation,  
With senators on the bench.

Talking about 'beasts', he relapses into prose, but is no less eloquent (IV. iii. 324) :

If thou wert the lion, the tox would beguile thee ; if thou wert the lamb, the fox would cat thee ; if thou wert the fox, the lion would suspect thee, when, peradventure, thou wert accus'd by the ass. If thou wert the ass, thy dulness would torment thee ; and still thou liv'dst but as a breakfast to the wolf. If thou wert the wolf, thy greediness would afflict thee, and oft thou shouldst hazard thy life for thy dinner. Wert thou the unicorn, pride and wrath would confound thee, and make thine own self the conquest of thy fury. Wert thou a bear, thou would'st be kill'd by the horse ; wert thou a horse, thou would'st be seiz'd by the leopard ; wert thou a leopard, thou wert german to the lion, and the spots of thy kindred were juniors on thy life. All thy safety were remotion, and thy defence absence. What beast couldst thou be that were not subject to a beast ?

Comparing Timon with Alceste, Peter Alexander notes the essential difference between the "laughter in which Moliere immerses Alceste" and the "madness that engulfs Timon" :

"His tragic story permits Shakespeare to pierce the pretences of the world with an invective beyond anything in Moliere's sardonic smile. Timon can no longer endure that part of himself that makes him one of the conspiracy into which society so regularly resolves itself . . . He turns in disgust from all that seems to nourish this monster in our natures".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 186.

A man of action, Alcibiades' anger takes a strictly practical turn ; and yet, when he is at the point of accomplishing full 'revenge', he is human enough to respond to the plea of the senators on the walls. Coriolanus yields to the treble impact of son's, wife's and mother's love: Alcibiades, a somewhat coarser man, — one who no doubt sees through the senators' pleas even as he grasps the main force behind them, — is content with the substance of revenge : or, rather, with the 'judicious punishment of the culprits in the place of the blind indiscriminate destruction of a whole city. When the senators urge (V. iv. 35) —

All have not offended ;  
For those that were, it is not square to take,  
On those that are, revenge : crimes, like lands,  
Are not inherited . . . Like a shepherd  
Approach the fold and cull th' infected forth,  
But kill not all together—

Alcibiades replies (not forgetting Timon) :

Those enemies of Timon's and mine own.  
Whom you yourselves shall set out for reproof,  
Fall, and no more.

Till death — and beyond — Alcibiades is Timon's unfaltering friend, for not even the bitter Epitaph (which distantly anticipates Henchard's in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*) disconcerts him but only makes him apostrophise dead Timon's spirit thus (V. iv. 74) :

These well express in thee thy latter spirits.  
Though thou abhorr'dst in us our human griefs,  
Scorn'dst our brain's flow, and those our droplets which  
From niggard nature fall, yet rich conceit  
Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye  
On thy low grave, on faults forgiven. Dead  
Is noble Timon, of whose memory  
Hereafter more.

*Noble* Timon ; and even in death, lapped by the illimitable sea ! Such tragic Katharsis as there is in the play is to be distilled from this concluding scene in which Alcibiades does the right thing by both Timon and Athens so that we needn't think any more of Timon being pitted *against* Athens but talk of him again as Timon *of* Athens.

The parallels between *Timon* and *Lear* on the one hand and *Timon* and *Coriolanus* on the other have led—in the absence of incontrovertible evidence—to considerable speculation regarding the 'date' of the play. Does it belong to the 2-3 years (1604-6) of Shakespeare's full maturity as a tragic playwright, or must we rather push it to the end of the 'Tragic Period' and make it contemporaneous with, if not subsequent to, *Coriolanus*? Bradley's view is that *Timon* "is more likely to have been composed immediately after *King Lear* and before *Macbeth*".<sup>7</sup> Allied to the question of 'date' is the more important question of the authorship of the play. *Timon* lacks the structural unity of *King Lear* which, although its scope is infinite, has a simple enough and logical enough frame-work. *Lear* and Gloucester banish their good daughters and good son respectively; they are themselves as good as thrown out by the bad daughters and the bastard son; then follows (in Act III) a picture of a world in dissolution; presently (in Act IV) the process of rescue and recovery begins; and (in the last Act) there is war, martyrdom, retribution, and the promise of restoration of stability. In *Timon* we have the feeling that "the play is two plays, casually joined in the middle; or rather two poems, two pictures, in swan white and raven black. The contrast is all".<sup>8</sup> The equivalent of the storm (the supreme solvent of the rival plots: the supreme blanket for all the characters: the supreme chastiser that is also the supreme redeemer) is the brief explosive scene of Timon's last banquet (III. vi). Whereas *Lear* says (III. iv. 33), "Take physic, pomp", as a lesson in moral deportment, Timon says with regulated fury, "Soft, take thy physic first; thou too, and thou", and throws dishes at his guests and drives them out. The passion spent (for the time being), he says as if in the accents of finality (III. vi. 104):

<sup>7</sup> *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 246; also Note S (pp. 443-5).

<sup>8</sup> Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare*, p. 249. Una Ellis-Fermor also notes "the two great weaknesses in the structure . . . that the character of Timon is inadequate to the theme and that the action does not knit together his fate and that of the other people in the play" (*Shakespeare the Dramatist*, 1961, p. 175). While believing that *Timon* can be "interpreted as a whole",—Timon, since he fails to be a god, becomes a man; but Alcibiades is content to be a man all along,—David Cook nevertheless concludes that though the 'idea' is powerfully conceived, it is "not realised in fully developed dramatic terms" (*Shakespeare Survey* 16, p. 94).



Burn house ! Sink Athens ! Henceforth hated be  
Of Timon man and all humanity !

But this hardly explains the total shift from the house of friendship, music, art, love and polished conversation to the cave of loneliness, harshness, downrightness, hate and barking speech. Besides this structural weakness, there is the uneven quality of the writing : an apparent jumble of prose, blank verse and free verse, of poetry, bathos and banality. Where Lear has his Fool, Timon has his — Apemantus :

*Apemantus.* Beast !  
*Timon.* Slave !  
*Apemantus.* Toad !  
*Timon.* Rogue, rogue, rogue !

The born cynic and the made Misanthropos exchange abuses so freely that one has a shrinking feeling that, perhaps, Shakespeare is simply letting himself go — at whom in particular, we do not know. In fact, Middleton Murry sees in the words of the Poet in *Timon* (I. i. 16) —

When we for recompense have prais'd the vile,  
It stains the glory in that happy verse  
Which aptly sings the good —

a clear autobiographical glance on the part of Shakespeare :

‘He looked back on the episode of patronage and dedication, and it was ashes and bitterness in his mouth. And so he puts at the forefront of his savage, bitter, incoherent play, a poet in the act of presenting his work to a truly noble lord, and suddenly, almost involuntarily, remembering a former act of dedication, and feeling that by its baseness his present sincerity is corrupted’.<sup>9</sup>

Murry assumes that *Timon* was written at about the time of the publication of the *Sonnets*, but an earlier date is by no means inconsistent with the theory of excrescent (or unintegrated) autobiographical elements in the play. Is *Timon* in the form we have it an “unfinished” play? Did Shakespeare revise somebody else’s work? Did somebody else revise Shakespeare’s work? We shall never know for certain. Under the circumstances, the hypothesis (an old theory stated anew) offered by

<sup>9</sup> *Shakespeare* (1936), pp. 93-4.

T. M. Parrott seems as satisfying as any.<sup>10</sup> Shakespeare began writing *Timon* encouraged by the great theatrical success of *King Lear*, but since his sources were fullest for the latter part, he wrote Act IV first and made only rough sketches of the rest of the play. The anecdote about Timon dwelling near the sea in Plutarch's *Life of Antony* gave the germinating idea of the misanthrope; and there were also references to Apemantus, the fig tree (which appears in the play in V. i. 203ff), and the Epitaph. Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades* gave some ideas too, and Lucian's dialogue on Timon makes mention of the buried treasure. While all this came handy, the writing of the first part of the play—Timon in affluence—called for sheer imaginative creation. Shakespeare sketched the parallel groups of false friends and faithful servants (like the 'bad' and 'good' people in *Lear*), but before he could fully endow them with life and complete the play as a rounded unity, there came the peremptory call for a play to be presented at court, and Shakespeare "attacked the problem of *Macbeth* . . . after the strenuous effort involved in *Macbeth*, he abandoned *Timon* and turned to the easier task of dramatising Plutarch's fascinating narratives of Antony and of Coriolanus".<sup>11</sup> Later, much later, working on Shakespeare's draft—part finished, part in the form of sketches and notes—somebody else finished the piece. But *Timon* never became a popular play. The Shakespearian *elan* comes and goes, but doesn't dwell as a steady light and force. *Timon*, like the hero himself, is the ruin of a great tragedy that might have been. But even from the ruin we can infer the completed possibility,—though the play actually before us is only Timon digging for roots, cursing mankind, and finding unexpected gold; evoking terror and nausea, yet also much pity; provoking jars and hisses, yet also some truly Shakespearian poetry.

<sup>10</sup> *Shakespearean Comedy*, pp. 305-6.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 307. King James traced his descent from Banquo, and so the play on Macbeth and Banquo seemed more appropriate for presentation at Court than a play on Timon and Alcibiades.

## II

## MACBETH

Of the four great tragedies, *Hamlet* is the most universal, for Hamlet's consciousness comprehends everybody's; *Othello* is the most poignant, for the killing of Desdemona under a delusion is as profoundly affecting as Oedipus blinding himself when the armour of his delusion suddenly falls off; and *King Lear* is the most cosmic, for it achieves a total descent into the Hells of bestiality and cruelty before labouring upward along Purgatory's slopes towards almost the threshold of Paradise. As for *Macbeth*, it is the shortest, yet the most awe-inspiring and essentially 'tragic' of the quartet, for the issue between Good and Evil—an intestine struggle—is nowhere else so sharply presented; and so vivid indeed is the evocation of Evil here that Wilson Knight has called *Macbeth* "the Apocalypse of Evil".<sup>12</sup> From the polarisation of forces in *Hamlet* between the Prince and Claudius we move, in *Othello*, to the struggle between Othello's 'good' and 'bad' angels (Desdemona-Beatrice and Iago-Lucifer) for the possession of the 'noble' Moor. In *King Lear* disruptive forces are unleashed on a cosmic scale, a whole universe seems to be out of joint, the Chain of Being seems to break to pieces, and the ship of humanity all but dashes itself against the rocks of cruelty in the primordial seas of bestiality. In *Macbeth* there is a return to the simple scheme,—the simplest in the tragedies. "*Macbeth* is distinguished by its simplicity", says Bradley, "by grandeur in simplicity, no doubt, but still by simplicity".<sup>13</sup> There is only *one* dominant character: Macbeth; and Lady Macbeth herself has her importance only in relation to him. While the theme of the play is, on a superficial view, Macbeth's 'crime' and its consequences, more than the physical action and the visible consequences it is actually the condition of Macbeth's mind—how it countenanced and willed the crime and persisted in the career of crime and how it reacted to the crime and its outer consequences—that constitutes the real centre of interest in the play. Evil like a bacillus enters Macbeth's mind: the 'anti-bodies' resist

<sup>12</sup> *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 174.

<sup>13</sup> *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 388.

the invader, but it quickly multiplies: evil locally triumphs but feels insecure: there is presently the accelerating speed of the infection: not the mind alone, but everything else also, is gangrened. Doubtless both Hamlet and Macbeth present a spectacle of 'waste', and neither of course could plead — as a Lear or even an Othello could — that he is more sinned against than sinning; but the causes that occasion the 'waste' are different. John Drinkwater said that *Macbeth* is "the tragedy of unchecked will destroying itself", whereas *Hamlet* is "the tragedy of unready will wasting itself". Roy Walker states the contrast in similar, though not identical, terms:

"If Hamlet is a study of moral man in an immoral society, *Macbeth* is a study of immoral man in a moral society".<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, it is not as though Macbeth is just an immoral man, branded so at birth; or that his is just a steam-roller will experiencing no check or hesitation on the way. The reason why the drama grips us is that Macbeth is pushed — or allows himself to be pushed — over the abyss, partly by his own propensities and partly by circumstances; and once that happens, his fall acquires inevitably an accelerating momentum till he crashes at the bottom at last, despairing yet defiant still. Macbeth is man enough from beginning to end to interest us profoundly, and as he becomes more and more the vehicle of evil, the terror and the pity he inspires in us make him the tragic hero in excelsis. "Macbeth is a thoroughly representative human being", says G. R. Elliott, and the play, "in its whole design, bodies forth the essence of the tragedy of mankind".<sup>15</sup> Macbeth relies a little too much on his own will, flirts a little too much with what he knows to be 'immoral'; he is in this prototypical of over-confident but self-destroying humanity that too often hugs the vain hope that it can somehow both eat the cake and have it. To quote Rossiter,

"It is a great poem because the powers of the mind that it invokes are in all human beings . . . Its 'theme' is not ambition, or sin, or guilt merely; but rather the equivocal nature of Nature: Nature in which all things exist, whether we call them good or evil: which builds and des-

<sup>14</sup> *The Time is Free* (1949), p. 218.

<sup>15</sup> *Dramatic Providence in 'Macbeth'* (1958), p. 32.

troys ; which has a natural order, to which man feels he belongs and is blessed in that hope ; and which seems also to be moved by forces as potent and chaotic as the Witches".<sup>16</sup>

It would, however, be a truer reading to say that, although Nature is apparently equivocal, although man has 'free will' to do evil or good, he is not really free to control the consequences of his actions. Behind Nature there is Supernature ; and behind the Euclidean universe there is the 'moral' universe. This Macbeth himself realises clearly (I. vii. 2) :

If th' assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
With his surcease, success ; that but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here — . . .  
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases  
We still have judgement here, that we but teach  
Bloody instructions, which being taught return  
To plague th' inventor. This even-handed justice  
Commends th' ingreience of our poison'd chalice  
To our own lips.

In *Julius Caesar* — with which Allardyce Nicoll meaningfully compares *Macbeth*<sup>17</sup> — Brutus attempts a tortuous explanation (II. i. 10ff) for joining the conspiracy against his friend and benefactor, Caesar : and it is to Macbeth's credit that he doesn't so attempt to deceive himself (or others). He makes his choice with eyes wide open, and he is "fiend-like only by the analogy of his absolute choice".<sup>18</sup> He chooses the wrong road, and having done so, he becomes a prey to nameless terrors, the omnipresent spectre of blood and the chronic disease of sleeplessness. The merc soldier ("Bellona's bridgroom") had known no fear ; on the field of battle, the flow of blood hadn't appalled him ; and evidently, like all men of action, he could sleep. Once he kills Duncan and puts himself outside the walls of the City of God, he isn't the same man any more. Like Satan, like Adam and Eve, Macbeth had the freedom to opt for evil ; even as they couldn't, he too couldn't annul the consequences. After Duncan's death, neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth is the person

<sup>16</sup> *Angel with Horns*, p. 219.

<sup>17</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 135.

<sup>18</sup> M. D. H. Parker, *The Slave of Life*, p. 164.

they had been before. They have murdered sleep ; they have murdered themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Why, then, did Macbeth do the deed ? Shakespeare took the story from Holinshed — the principal characters, the witches and their prophecies, the influence of Lady Macbeth, the killing of Banquo and the escape of Fleance, the growing tyranny, the slaughter of Macduff's family, the Macduff-Malcolm conversation (IV. iii), the march to Dunsinane, and the final encounter between Macbeth and Macduff ; and for the actual manner in which Duncan is murdered in his sleep in Macbeth's castle, Shakespeare might have used the story (also narrated by Holinshed) of the killing of King Duff by Donwald and his wife. Perhaps also, as urged by Mrs. C. C. Stopes and Dover Wilson, Shakespeare might have been indebted to the manuscript poem, William Stewart's *Bulk of the Cronicles of Scotland*, written in 1531-5.<sup>20</sup> Again, for Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking scene, Shakespeare might have owed something (as suggested by E. I. Fripp) to his conversations with his son-in-law, Dr. John Hall. However, the changes Shakespeare made in the story in the process of transmuting it into a poetic tragedy are more to the point when we consider the interplay of character and motive in determining the 'action' of the drama. Holinshed supplies Macbeth with a clear grievance : by naming his son Malcolm as the Prince of Cumberland, Duncan "did what in him lay to defraud him (Macbeth) of all maner of title and claime, which he might in time to come, pretend unto the crowne". This is no doubt implied in the play as well (I. iv. 48) :

The Princee of Cumberland ! That is a step,  
On which I must fall down, or else o'er-leap,  
For in my way it lies.

But the legitimacy (in Scottish law) of Macbeth's own claims — both Macbeth and Duncan being grandsons to Old Malcolm, by

<sup>19</sup> Cf. H. B. Charlton : " Macbeth . . . kills another man, destroys, that is, another piece of human nature. But, doing so, he destroys the human nature in himself. It is all as simple as that". (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 182). Again, comparing *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Macbeth*, M. C. Bradbrook writes : " The crime which Tarquin commits, even more clearly, though not more truly, than Macbeth's, destroys the natural ties between him and the rest of humanity. It is a sort of suicide . . . Macbeth's real victim is himself " (*Shakespeare Survey* 4, p. 46).

<sup>20</sup> Relevant extracts are printed in the *New Arden* edition (Ed. by K. Muir), pp. 189ff.

his two daughters, Doda and Beatrice — is left rather vague. Thus Shakespeare's Macbeth is more of an usurper than Holinshed's. Secondly, whereas Holinshed makes Banquo an accomplice to Macbeth's crime, Shakespeare again merely hedges. As James I was supposed to be descended from Banquo, on prudential considerations Shakespeare might have played down Banquo's complicity in Macbeth's crime. Banquo was one of the victims, not the criminal ! Yet on a careful reading of the play one is not so sure. Like Ibsen's Rubeck (in *When We Dead Awaken*), who makes busts with a superficial resemblance to his patrons but endowed at bottom with horse-faces, donkey-muzzles, dog-skulls, pig-snouts or bull-fronts, so also Shakespeare has allowed the essential truth to remain in his portraiture of Banquo. When the Witches speak to Macbeth, Banquo desires that they should speak to him too ; and, later, the two thanes exchange significant words :

*Macbeth.* Your children shall be kings.

*Banquo.* You shall be King.

When Macbeth is named the Thane of Cawdor (I. iii. 107), Banquo exclaims : " What, can the devil speak true ? " The earlier brief exchange is now annotated in *asides* (I. iii. 118) :

*Macbeth.* Do you not hope your children shall be kings,  
When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me  
Promis'd no less to them ?

*Banquo.* That, trusted home,  
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,  
Besides the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange ;  
And oftentimes to win us to our harm,  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,  
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's  
In deepest consequence.

Banquo's prudence comes out in the last lines, as it comes out in the brief dialogue shortly before the murder (II. i. 20ff). No doubt, Banquo is no Macbeth, he hasn't Macbeth's opportunity, and he hasn't a Lady Macbeth by his side. Immediately after the murder, Banquo seems to be properly shocked and justly suspicious (II. iii. 128) :

Fears and scruples shake us.  
 In the great hand of God I stand, and thence  
 Against the undivulgd pretence I fight  
 Of treasonous malice.

But in point of fact he does nothing. He evidently toes the official line that Duncan's sons are guilty of his death. At the same time, Banquo does have his suspicions (III. i. 1) :

Thou hast it now — King, Cawdor, Glamis, all  
 As the weird women promis'd; and I fear  
 Thou play'st most foully for't.

"The Witches and his own ambition have conquered him", says Bradley.<sup>21</sup> This makes Banquo at least an accessory *after* the fact. While Macduff avoids going to Scone for Macbeth's coronation, Banquo is present, and is undoubtedly on friendly terms with the new King. What, then, are we to make of his actions? William Miller, discussing Banquo's character, comments as follows :

"Does sordid self-interest rule him? Or does he fear that opposition will but kindle civil war to the destruction of the nation? Or is his conscience, like that of some men, a conscience awake to the moral quality of his private actions, but one that fails to remind him how public men have public duties which it is a baseness and a sin to set aside? However such questions may be answered, Banquo does not go in perfect innocence to the death which his carelessness occasions . . . the neglect of duty brings retribution as much as open fault, and want of thought may be, in outward if not in spiritual result, as fatal as downright guilt".<sup>22</sup>

But of course, notwithstanding Banquo's guilty silence *after* Duncan's murder, Macbeth's primary culpability remains. Shakespeare ignores his legitimacy, and is at least equivocal about Banquo's complicity : both tend to present a Macbeth more blackened than in Holinshed. A third circumstance is Shakespeare's ignorance of the ten years of Macbeth's rule "in equall justice", to which Holinshed makes clear reference. Thus Shakespeare's Macbeth is to all intents and designs an ambitious usurper, murderer and tyrant. He had *thought* about doing away with Duncan

<sup>21</sup> *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 385.

<sup>22</sup> *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, p. 130.



even before meeting the Witches. When Macbeth tells his wife  
(I. vii. 31) —

We will proceed no further in this business.  
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought  
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,  
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,  
Not cast aside so soon —

Lady Macbeth flares up —

Was the hope drunk  
Wherein you dress'd yourself? ...  
What beast was't then  
That made you break this enterprise to me?  
... Nor time nor place  
Did *then* adhere, and yet you would make both;  
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now  
Does unmake you.

This 'then' could only refer to a time prior to the events enacted in the play. So, then, we have (1) Macbeth's own thoughts — shared with his wife — touching the liquidation of Duncan; (2) the 'supernatural soliciting' by the Weird Sisters at the beginning of the play; (3) the provocation caused by Duncan naming Malcolm as the Prince of Cumberland; (4) the opportunity offered by the circumstance of Duncan spending a night at Macbeth's castle; and (5) the persuasive vehemence of Lady Macbeth's role in the affair. Holinshed explains how "the words of the three sisters also ... greatly encouraged him (Macbeth) herunto, but specially his wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she that was verie ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of a queene". In Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth is so fully identified with her husband that her ambition is only on account of him. "There is not a trace of self-seeking in Lady Macbeth", says R. G. Moulton; "throughout the play she is never found meditating upon what she is to gain by the crown; wife-like, she has no sphere but the career of her husband".<sup>23</sup> Boiled down, Lady Macbeth's arguments come only to this: the move had come from her husband first, and he had then backed it with an oath; yet now he is trying to back out, — a thing that

<sup>23</sup> *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, p. 156.

she, a mere woman, sooner than do it, would rather dash her child's brains out! On the other hand, she also knows that, if the categorical imperative of his conscience were at work, nothing could be done (I. v. 19):<sup>24</sup>

Thou'dst have, great Glamis, that which cries  
 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it;  
 And that which rather thou dost fear to do  
 Than wishest should be undone.

If he had a conscience, it would tell him flatly that he *must* keep out all murderous thoughts. But with Macbeth, mere feelings, inclinations, susceptibilities, proclivities — even when they generally incline to what is good — haven't hardened into 'character' with the clear light of conscience to guide it.<sup>25</sup> Macbeth hankers after the crown: knows that only through murder he could get it immediately: yet shrinks from the act from motives like gratitude for recent gifts and the possibility of losing the good opinion of "all sorts of people". Had Macbeth said, "I won't do it, for it is morally wrong", Lady Macbeth would doubtless have accepted the position. But his reasons are not so fundamental: they seem only to proceed from his timidity or sentimentality or fear of failure. Hence Lady Macbeth thinks that it is her duty as wife to help him to overcome his timidity, buoy up his courage, and exorcise away his sentimental fancies. She is no more 'moral' than Macbeth, but neither is she the arch-villain. Even as one wishes that Banquo had been more assertive *after* the murder, one wishes too that Lady Macbeth had been less eloquent or persuasive *before* the murder. But Macbeth's alone is the main — and indeed the sole — responsibility for the murder. Neither the weird women's prophecies nor the elevation of Malcolm, neither the temptation offered by 'opportunity' nor the overpowering force of Lady Macbeth's advocacy, was the finally determining factor in Macbeth's killing Duncan. He did it because, with a feeling of fatality as it were, he was willing to take the risk and damn the consequences. In his soliloquy immediately before the murder, he seems to recoil from the vision of a dagger, — first the dagger, then the dagger with "gouts of blood" on the blade. Is it a final warning from Heaven? Or a

<sup>24</sup> See Hamill's annotation of this passage referred to on p. 49.

<sup>25</sup> See William Miller, *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, p. 86.

'go-ahead' signal from Hell? A part of his mind recalls with vivid appropriateness "Tarquin's ravishing strides" — Macbeth *knows* that what he is about to do is a gross rebellion against Nature, and yet he goes out to do it; this is the fatality that grips him by the throat and pushes him into Duncan's chamber. He is like a man possessed; while the mind stirs with scruple and memory, the will seizes the steering-wheel of action. The sinister prophecies, the infernal force of Lady Macbeth's advocacy, the vision of blood and dagger, all build up a diabolic atmosphere that serves as a catalyst spurring Macbeth to take the fatal decisive step. Commenting on this G. R. Elliott writes:

"This diabolic atmosphere moves us deeply because all of us are aware at times of black desires arising in our consciousness suddenly and shockingly. These, we nowadays believe, derive from the subconscious fund of evil propensities accumulated in mankind during the past million years or so. That belief is comprised, really, in the outlook of Shakespeare though, for dramatic purposes at least, he also accepts the older belief that evil is fundamentally devilish... For Shakespeare, as for Dante and most of the other great Renaissance writers, evil is both human and hellish. And the pressure of the hellish realm of evil upon Macbeth is so dreadfully heavy that he never completely loses our sympathy".<sup>28</sup>

Returning from Duncan's room, Macbeth says in a hoarse whisper: "I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a voice?" She asks, "Did not you speak?" *When? Now. As I descended? Ay.* The words are simple, yet unearthly in the context. Seeing that the sleeping Duncan resembled her father, Lady Macbeth had felt unnerved. Hearing the servants (or chamberlains) cry in their sleep 'God bless us' and 'Amen', Macbeth had been unable to say 'Amen'. But he has heard a sinister voice say (II. ii. 40):

Still it cried 'Sleep no more' to all the house;  
'Glamis hath murder'd sleep; and therefore Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more — Macbeth shall sleep no more'.

<sup>28</sup> *Dramatic Providence in 'Macbeth'*, p. 29. "Macbeth is above all a triumph of atmosphere", writes A. L. Rowse; "a sombre realm of guilt, guilt for murder suggested, premeditated, accomplished, and at length expiated" (*William Shakespeare*, p. 381). Peter Quennell points out that the witches are "harmless anachronisms" compared to the denizens of Macbeth's private hell, the atmosphere of which is evoked by "a complex literary symbolism, in which every image is designed to strengthen the effect of darkness, claustrophobic solitude and incommunicable nervous dread" (*Shakespeare: The Poet & His Background*, p. 301).

He is afraid to think of what he has done, and he will not go back to Duncan's chamber. His bloody hands "pluck out" his eyes. The consciousness of the enormity of what he has done breaks out in the tremendous lines —

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red.

Lady Macbeth thinks it is no such serious matter :

A little water clears us of this deed.  
How easy is it then?

(What grim irony : for this same Lady Macbeth will later rub her hands as if washing them, and "continue in this a quarter of an hour".) Macbeth himself recovers his equanimity enough to kill the innocent chamberlains and to start living (like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde) at two levels of consciousness, the inner man with the viperous feeling of self-wrought damnation and the surface man asserting his reality through more and more 'action', while his speech uncertainly hovers between these two levels of consciousness, now reflecting one, now the other. Hearing Macduff speak of Duncan's death, Macbeth says (II. iii. 89) :

Had I but died an hour before this chance.  
I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,  
There's nothing serious in mortality —  
All is but toys; renown and grace is dead;  
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees  
Is left this vault to brag of.

What does he mean? Is he merely hypocritical? Is he ambivalent? Do his words helplessly oscillate between the two levels of consciousness? Does the sense the surface man wants to put into the speech acquire another connotation as the inner man suddenly takes control? Isn't the inner man pronouncing a doom on the merely mortal Macbeth? "*There's nothing serious in mortality*" : is Macbeth commenting on Duncan's death, wondering why God (or whatever gods may be) permitted the killing to take place? Is an anointed King's life no more than this — no more than toys, to use or to cast away? Is the universe *not*

'moral', after all? Can 'renown and grace' be so easily put out? But the surface Macbeth gains control again,—and, in fact, he overacts his part in II. iii. 107ff to such an extent that Lady Macbeth (exhausted even otherwise) swoons either in sudden fright or with a view to attracting the attention of the assembled thanes to herself and thereby making them ignore her husband. He now manages the situation well enough to get himself 'named' King and proceeds to Scone to be invested. Malcolm and Donalbain have already left for England and Ireland respectively. All is apparently safe,—yet Macbeth cannot rest content. He has bartered away his soul to Satan, but only so that Banquo's children may rule over Scotland (III. i. 64):

For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;  
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;  
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace  
Only for them, and mine eternal jewel  
Given to the common enemy of man  
To make them kings—the seeds of Banquo kings!

He needs must employ hired assassins to do away with Banquo and his son, Fleance. His soul's damnation taken for granted, why not be even with his enemies and rivals *here*? The coarsened Mr. Hyde is the senior partner, and henceforth Dr. Jekyll must needs speak in whispers and undertones.

The expedition against Banquo and Fleance is the climax of the rising action, for in its actual execution both success and failure are mingled. "This expedition", says Moulton, "the keystone to the arch, is found to occupy the exact middle of the middle Act" (III. iii. 18).<sup>27</sup> In the Banquet Scene (III. iv), the falling action has begun. Banquo's Ghost appears at the feast, usurps Macbeth's seat, and quite unmans him—and he stares and trembles and speaks agitatedly:

Thou canst not say I did it; never shake  
Thy gory locks at me . . .  
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.  
If charnel-houses and our graves must send  
Those that we bury back, our monuments  
Shall be the maws of kites . . .

<sup>27</sup> *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, p. 127.

The time hath been  
 That when the brains were out the man would die,  
 And there an end; but now they rise again,  
 With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,  
 And push us from our stools . . .  
 Avaunt, and quit my sight. Let the earth hide thee.  
 Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;  
 Thou hast no speculation in those eyes  
 Which thou dost glare with!

And, after the thanes leave as requested by Lady Macbeth, he breaks out again: "It will have blood; they say blood will have blood" Before the scene concludes, Macbeth realises that, although Banquo is dead, another prepotent enemy remains: Macduff. The fall of Banquo synchronises with the rise of Macduff; and with Banquo's fall Macbeth has ensured that his own fall cannot now be long delayed. The 'moral' universe can be neither cheated nor outwitted. God is *not* mocked. Human mortality is serious indeed. But, then, there is no going back either for Macbeth, or so he thinks; for "returning were as tedious as go o'er". As Elliott annotates,

"With Satanic arrogance he (Macbeth) avers that 'Returning', i.e. repentance sought with religious patience, would be equally 'tedious'. Really he is stepping, for the first time deliberately, into the awful tedium which (as in Dante's *Inferno*) characterises Hell".<sup>28</sup>

It is a grim understatement with which the scene concludes: "We are but young in deed". Bradley's apt comment is: "What a frightful clearness of self-consciousness in this descent to hell, and yet what a furious force in the instinct of life and self-assertion that drives him on!"<sup>29</sup> Macbeth will dare yet further and try to annul altogether the division between the inner resisting soul and the surface dominant will.

Between the killing of Duncan and the killing of Banquo there was a stretch of 10 years, which in Shakespeare's play seems to be compressed into a matter of a few days. Tom F. Driver compares *Macbeth* with *Oedipus Tyrannus* with regard to their "acute awareness of the problem of dramatic time", and distinguishes between historical time (i.e. 17 years in all in Holinshed; about 10 weeks in Shakespeare), "Macbeth's time", and

<sup>28</sup> *Dramatic Providence in 'Macbeth'*, p. 141.

<sup>29</sup> *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 362.

"providential time" which is a meditating phenomenon and "an expression of social and universal consciousness".<sup>30</sup> *Oedipus Tyrannus* is Oedipus exercising his freedom, looking back, and discovering his past, and in the play's end are the beginnings of his salvation through complete submission to his fate. In Shakespeare's play, on the contrary, Macbeth determines his own future by exercising wrongly the freedom of choice, and wading deeper and deeper into sin and crime.<sup>31</sup> That we are not actual criminals doesn't prove that incentives, influences, and temptations similar to those that ring a man like Macbeth round don't have their designs upon us too. In Francois Mauriac's novel, *The End of the Night*, Therese Desqueyroux tells Georges Filhot that, seen under a microscope, most of us, most of the time, are murderers of a sort, always engaged in the task of throwing unwanted people "neck and crop" out of our lives. Hence the sheerly naked power of a play like *Macbeth* (or a novel like *Therese*). *Macbeth* speaks to us, it is almost about us (*there*, but for the grace of God, are we I). The terrific immediacy and urgency of the play's psychological action is thus brought out by John Masefield:

"In *Macbeth* he (Shakespeare) saw powers (outside human life, and unable to act directly upon men) who want the rhythm of life broken, and strive to break it by promptings, by inarticulate cryings which are misunderstood and prophecies which are misinterpreted. He saw these powers as parts of a devilish will in things, against which all that is upright in the soul of man is ever a barrier ... All this is set forth with the utmost haunting magical power. All feel that power ... Even in cold print the words are marvellous ... No man can hear them without knowing that Shakespeare as he wrote was at the heart of life ... In that mood, which was perhaps brief, perhaps only the half of one day (for I have no doubt that at least half of *Macbeth* was written at a sitting), his mind became pure energy and its thoughts partook of the nature of pure energy: they became indestructible".<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *The Sense of History in Greek and Shakespearean Drama* (1960), p. 148.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 167. And John Lawlor writes: "... if man freely chooses to disregard the laws made for his guidance as a rational creature, he will find himself compelled to obey those designed for the lower orders of nature ... in this play, where the supernatural is abundantly employed, the stress is upon the reality of choice, on the steady descent from agent to patient once the bound of the natural is overstepped" (*The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare*, 1960, pp. 143-4).

<sup>32</sup> *Shakespeare and Spiritual Life* (The Romanes Lecture, 1924), pp. 24-6.

From I. i to III. iv it is a single gigantic wave of psychic energy achieving glorious poetic transmutation : we are carried along, — the current of Shakespeare's passion and poetry carries us along, — and there is no parallel for this anywhere even in Shakespearian tragedy.

The rest of the play merely comprises the consequences of the 'actions' already accomplished. A time comes in the life of Dr. Jekyll when the Hyde-condition is the normal one, and he needs increasing medication to revert to his former (true) self. So too, by III. iv, it is not necessary for the Weird Sisters to seek out Macbeth — *he* must go out in search of them! In IV. i, he does so seek them out, and they ply their advantage home : "Beware Macduff!", they tell him. They lull him with hypothetical security (IV. i. 79 ; 92) :

Be bloody, bold, and resolute ; laugh to scorn  
The pow'r of man, for none of woman born  
Shall harm Macbeth . . .

Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until  
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane Hill  
Shall come against him.

But they can give him no real solace ; it is Banquo's issue that will rule over Scotland till the very crack of doom ! But even this only still further hardens Macbeth's heart, and he resolves wholly and finally to break with the voice within. Apprised of Macduff's flight, he says he will "give to the edge o' th' sword/ His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls/ That trace him in his line". (Banquo's issue he cannot touch, so he will wreck his vengeance at least on Macduff's!) The slaughter of Lady Macduff and her children follows (IV. ii). and we have here reached the very Nadir of this hell — Macbeth's self-wrought haven of security ! The Malcolm-Macduff scene (IV. iii) bears the same relation to this play that the Cassius-Brutus scene does to *Julius Caesar* (IV. iii). Out of an apparent clash of purposes emerges a nobler harmony ; Brutus survives the suicide of Portia, Macduff the butchery of his wife and children (IV. iii. 223) :

Did heaven look on,  
And would not take their part ? Sinful Macduff,  
They were all struck for thee — nought that I am ;  
Not for their own demerits, but for mine,  
Fell slaughter on their souls . . .



But, gentle heavens,  
 Cut short all intermission; front to front  
 Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;  
 Within my sword's length set him ...

Now at last Macbeth and Macduff are properly and perfectly matched as the agents of Evil and of Good respectively. Stoutly resisting the still small voice of reason and humanity, Macbeth has committed the one utterly unforgivable and meaningless crime of his blood-boltered career, and out of this springs the Nemesis that must directly destroy him. Macduff's determination to revenge is yet tempered in the fires of unimaginable immitigable suffering; he is conscious of his own 'demerits', and he will not rail against heaven. He 'submits' first, and only then claims the right to fight as Heaven's sword-arm and bring punishment home to the fiend-like tyrant. Now Macduff is really Macbeth's 'mighty opposite'.

Nemesis: but it must comprehend both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth. Being acutely human and sensitive, they both realise quite early in their career of crime — first the woman, then the man — that the moral world cannot after all be wished away. Lady Macbeth fades out in Act IV. In V. i we see that she has already broken under the strain of living with her burden of guilt. The Banquet Scene had been almost too much for her, and the killing of Lady Macduff and her children must have been the last straw. The lacerations of Lady Macbeth's awakened conscience are graphed in V. i, but her conscience awakes only when her surface consciousness goes to sleep. She writes out confessions and seals them — she continually makes the gesture of washing her hands — and she makes strange speech while walking in her sleep:

Yet here's a spot ... Out, damned spot! out, I say! One, two ... Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? ... Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? ...

The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? ...

Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh! ...

Wash your hands, put on your nightgown, look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on's grave ...

All the three major crimes find mention : the murder of Duncan's first, then Lady Macduff's, and last Banquo's — and of course all whirl in her subconscious self in tantalising disorder. Her mind is in a jumble, her soul is in turmoil ; the Doctor says that her "heart is sorely charg'd", and adds : "Yet I have known those which have walk'd in their sleep who have died holily in their beds".

With Lady Macbeth 'returning' (repentance) has taken the form of the defeat of the outer self (the conscious will) and the revival of the inner self through recognition (of the guilt) and confession, and the purgation following in their wake. But Macbeth will not take the tedious path of 'return' ; he must go on and on, riding his rattling coach on more and more dangerous heaps of gravel. But although he has more than once determined to stifle the inner soul completely, it will occasionally start its mumble still (V. iii. 22) :

I have liv'd long enough. My way of life  
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf ;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have ; but, in their stead,  
Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,  
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

He asks the Doctor for a physic that could "pluck from memory a rooted sorrow", thinking more of himself than of his sick wife ; and the Doctor knows this too, for he says equivocally (V. iii. 45) :

Therein the patient  
Must minister to himself.

The news of his wife's death sets Macbeth incontinently on a voyage of discovery (V. v. 17) :

She should have died hereafter ;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle ! ...

Again, amid the transcendent generalisations in the accents of blinding bleeding poetry, Macbeth is only thinking of himself. His campaign of supping "full with horrors" has been, not so much a stupendous crime, but a gigantic folly. The dreaded tyrant sees himself truly in the role of a fool — almost an idiot; his 'will' has been nothing, his ambitions, hopes, achievements — nothing. But a poor player, he has been acted upon — than acting of his own sovereign volition; even the farcical play is fast concluding — and dusty death awaits him. Restored to this stark clarity of mind, he is not much daunted to discover the "equivocation of the fiend/That lies like truth" (V. v. 43). At least, he says, he will "die with harness on our back". In V. vii he feels "tied to a stake", to be baited like a bear; and yet he hugs to his hopeless bosom the last hope of all. With the recognition of the devil's last equivocation (V. viii. 13), the last of Macbeth's defences crumbles, and only his native courage remains. He will fight Macduff (not yield to him), he will "try the last". Macduff proves God's own deputy and avenger, and "the time is free" again from the pressure of Evil. Malcolm is King, and his is appropriately the final word:

... what needful else  
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace.  
We will perform in measure, time, and place.

It is a far cry from the opening scene on the heath: "Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches". Now it is the *grace of Grace* that is taking control. What began as a blast from Hell is here concluded with the promise of Heaven's nectarean airs. The hell-hound has been tracked to its lair, forced to give battle, and has been destroyed. But is that all? Is even such a man as Macbeth wholly surrendered to *him*? Isn't Macbeth's life an illustration rather of this passage from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans? —

"The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do ... I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am!"

Before we judge even this 'hell-hound', this 'dead butcher' Macbeth, we should (as Peter Alexander reminds us) ponder

over the truth in Donne's Christian caution (if not admonition) :

"Thou knowest this man's fall, but thou knowest not his wrastling; which perchance was such that almost his very fall is justified and accepted of God".<sup>33</sup>

### III

#### ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

Between *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* — the two 'Roman' plays that project the heroic and romantic Mark Antony — there lay the incredibly active eight years during which Shakespeare wrote the 'problem plays' and the great tragedies. But notwithstanding appearances, *Antony and Cleopatra* is not just a sequel to *Julius Caesar*. The Hamlet who moves about moodily in a cloak of inky black is different from the Hamlet of the Wittenberg days who had charmed Ophelia during a visit to Elsinore as scholar, courtier, soldier and the observed of all observers. The death of his father, the marriage of his mother, the Ghost's revelations — under these varied shocks Hamlet becomes a different man without however quite ceasing to be his earlier self. The later Antony is a changed man too, though changed in a different way, but the earlier Antony is not quite discarded. "The transition from the Julius Caesar of Shakspeare to his Antony and Cleopatra", says Dowden, "produces in us the change of pulse and temper experienced in passing from a gallery of antique sculpture to a room splendid with the colours of Titian and Paul Veronese".<sup>34</sup> There is an immediate clarity about *Julius Caesar* that makes this play (another, perhaps, is *Richard II*) an ideal first introduction to the world of Shakespearian tragedy. But *Antony and Cleopatra* is large, it dazzles and baffles, it confuses

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 173.

<sup>34</sup> *Shakspeare: His Mind and Art*, pp. 306-7. Critical literature on the Roman Plays includes M. W. MacCallum's *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (1910), Wilson Knight's *The Imperial Theme* (1930), John F. Danby's *Poets on Fortune's Hill* (1952), *Shakespeare Survey 10* (1957), Maurice Charney's *Shakespeare's Roman Plays: The Function of Imagery* (1961), Ernest Schanzer's *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (1963), and Derek Traversi's *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* (1963).

and consumes the reader. The witchery and fascination of the play are as irresistible as Cleopatra in her barge floating on the river Cydus. Critics almost forget their role when commenting on the play, and must needs employ superlatives or affirm their personal involvement in the play and its poetry. After striking "a more emotional note than is usual in such a place", even the staid *New Clarendon* editor excuses himself "by the precedent of other critics . . . and also by the insistence that the feeling is genuine and long standing".<sup>35</sup> Arthur Symonds calls *Antony and Cleopatra* the "most wonderful" of all Shakespeare's plays, because Cleopatra is the "most wonderful of Shakespeare's women".<sup>36</sup> In a recent paper, David Daiches calls it "the most magnificent and the most puzzling of Shakespeare's tragedies".<sup>37</sup> While *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* are all tragedies of love, the cast of the characters, the pattern of the circumstances and the shape of the catastrophes, all differ from play to play. What divides and destroys Romeo and Juliet is the feud between their families, and not any 'flaw' in either of the young lovers. In *Othello*, the love of the fair youthful Desdemona and the middle-aged Moor is the attraction of opposites, a challenge to 'reason'; and Iago exploits the situation to ruin the marriage. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, both the lovers are past their prime; their love has perpetually to stand an inquisition within themselves; and it is a daily war and a daily conquest — the honours however being evenly shared by the Roman General and the Egyptian Enchantress. Comparing *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, Coleridge says:

"This play should be perused in mental contrast with *Romeo and Juliet*; — as the love of passion and appetite opposed to the love of affection and instinct. But the art displayed in the character of Cleopatra is profound; in this, especially, that the sense of criminality in her passion is lessened by our insight into its depth and energy, at the very moment that we cannot but perceive that the passion itself springs out of the habitual craving of a licentious nature, and that it is supported and reinforced by voluntary stimulus and sought-for associations, instead of blossoming out of spontaneous emotion".

Even in *Othello*, the love of Desdemona for Othello provokes general incredulity. Brabantio thinks that Othello has used

<sup>35</sup> R. E. C. Houghton, the *New Clarendon* edition (1962), p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Studies in Elizabethan Drama* (1919), p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *English Studies*, XLIII, (October 1962), p. 343.

witchcraft. Iago plants the sinister thought in Othello that, however chastely innocent she may be, Desdemona is "yet a Decadent, in Nature's hands".<sup>38</sup> This is of course monstrously untrue, but how is average humanity to understand Desdemona's conduct except in terms of wilfulness and perversity? The love of Antony and Cleopatra fans the spark of incredulity to a blinding blaze, and we do not know what exactly to make of it. The Cleopatra of history and tradition was a synonym for lust and duplicity (as illustrated, for example, by a story like Gautier's 'One of Cleopatra's Nights') who had bewitched, among others, Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar before it came to Antony's turn. In the heat of jealous rage, Antony himself tells her in the play (III. xiii. 116) :

I found you as a morsel cold upon  
Dead Caesar's trencher. Nay, you were a fragment  
Of Cneius Pompey's, besides what hotter hours,  
Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have  
Luxuriously pick'd out ; for I am sure,  
Though you can guess what temperance should be,  
You know not what it is.

But this was not the whole truth, for Cleopatra was also the regal and resplendent Queen of Egypt : she was a princess "descended of so many royal kings" (V. ii. 325) : she says of herself with pardonable pride, "The man hath seen some majesty, and should know" (III. ii. 41) ; and even Octavius Caesar concedes that Cleopatra, "being royal, took her own way" (V. ii. 333). As if her sluttishness and her queenly magnificence are not extremes enough, the Cleopatra of history and tradition was also the loyal mistress who followed her Antony in death, proving by that brave act of taking off that her love was indeed — it had at last become — more than calculation or self-indulgence, and also that, far more than Fulvia or Octavia, she alone was Antony's wife. In his *A Dream of Fair Women*, Tennyson makes Cleopatra say :

A queen, with swarthy cheeks and bond black eyes,  
Brow-bound with burning gold,  
She, flashing forth a haughty smile, began :  
'I govern'd men by change, and so sway'd  
All moods . . .  
Where is Mark Antony ?

<sup>38</sup> George Gordon, *Shakespearian Comedy*, p. 97.

The man, my lover, with whom I rode sublime  
 On Fortune's neck; we sat as God by God . . .  
 I died a Queen. The Roman soldier found  
 Me lying dead, my crown about my brows,  
 A name for ever! — lying robed and crown'd,  
 Worthy a Roman spouse'.

Well, can three such Cleopatras be fused into a credible person? In his controversial *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays*, Levin Schucking draws a sharp contrast between the Cleopatra — the chameleonic, vulgar, heartless, immoral harlot — of the first part of the play and the "thoughtful and motherly woman" of the last Acts, and concludes that the two 'physiognomies' are irreconcilable. Actually the *three* physiognomies — the harlot, the Queen, and the martyr to love — are included and harmonised in the play. She fascinates and tantalises no doubt, but her characterisation is no jumble of shreds and patches, — she is alive in and because of Shakespeare's poetry, for "the poetry is the key — to Cleopatra's character as to all else".<sup>39</sup> Bethell also says that "to do justice to Shakespeare, we must radically alter our critical approach, and begin — and end — with the poetry itself".<sup>40</sup> But this too is a counsel of despair. The poetry may be the final reality, but there are characters who have assumed shape and life at the bidding of the poet's wand, and there are their raging passions that spin the plot, and we cannot simply will them out of existence.

If Cleopatra both dazzles and tantalises us, Antony too poses an almost insoluble problem. While the splendour of Shakespeare's poetry makes us accept the tragic fact, the mere intellect grumbles, rebels, and even rejects. Like Cleopatra's fascination, Antony's greatness is one of the two Absolutes of the play; but while we both feel and see the whole archness and richness of the fascination, we are only told (by himself or by others) about the greatness. We do in some measure infer it, but we do not quite see it in the full plenitude of action. There are tributes by Lepidus (I. iv. 10), by Caesar (I. iv. 56), and more than once by Cleopatra (I. v. 23; V. ii. 82):

I must not think there are  
 Evils enow to darken all his goodness.

<sup>39</sup> J. I. M. Stewart, *Character and Motive in Shakespeare*, p. 73.

<sup>40</sup> *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (1948), p. 117.

His faults, in him, seem as the spots of heaven,  
More fiery by night's blackness . . .

When thou once  
Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st  
Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel  
Did famine follow ; whom thou fought'st against,  
Though daintily brought up, with patience more  
Than savages could suffer . . .

The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm  
And burgonet of men . . .

His legs bestrid the ocean ; his rear'd arm  
Crested the world. His voice was propertyed  
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends ;  
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,  
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,  
There was no winter in't ; and autumn 'twas  
That grew the more by reaping

We see Antony's bounty in action when he sends Enobarbus' treasure to him even though he has gone over to Caesar (IV. v. 12). In IV. vii and viii, we see the lighter in action. Yet on the whole far more is left to our imagination. We are really meant to see him as others had seen him (or would like to see him). But we are constantly invaded by the force of Philo's words in the opening scene (I. i. 57) :

... sometimes when he is not Antony,  
He comes too short of that great property  
Which still should go with Antony.

In his oration beside the dead body of Julius Caesar, Antony's brilliant improvisations that are an adroit mixture of sincerity and calculation bring out the nature of the man. At Philippi too, Antony is the dominant figure, not Octavius. Ten years later, comparing their respective roles at Philippi, Antony says ruefully (III. xi. 35) :

He at Philippi kept  
His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck  
The lean and wrinkled Cassius ; and 'twas I  
That the mad Brutus ended ; he alone  
Dealt on lieutenantry, and no practice had  
In the brave squares of war. Yet now — no matter.



Antony has travelled far afield indeed, summed up by the four words: "Yet now — no matter".

In writing *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare follows Plutarch's Life of Antony closely, often using the very words in North's translation (a heavy folio volume); and it is almost certain that he found Appian's *History and Chronicle of the Roman Wars* (1578) also useful — especially with regard to the role of Sextus Pompeius (I. iii. 49), Antony's brother, Lucius (II. ii. 49), and Fulvia (II. ii. 98).<sup>41</sup> There was, besides, a play by Samuel Daniel, *Cleopatra*, which came out in 1594 and again, in a revised edition, in 1607. Shakespeare knew this play and might have taken some particulars from it (for example, Cleopatra's talk with Caesar in V. ii. 158ff). But Plutarch was the major — the main — source for Daniel and Shakespeare alike.

The year after Philippi, Antony as one of the triumvirs sent for Cleopatra, and what followed is thus described in Plutarch:

So she furnished herself with a world of gifts . . . yet she carried nothing with her wherein she trusted more than in herself, and in the charms and enchantment of her passing beauty and grace . . . she disdained to set forward otherwise, but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus; the poop whereof was of gold, the sails of purple, and the oars of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the music of flutes, bow-boys, cithernes, viols, and such other instruments as they played upon in the barge. And now for the person of her self, she was laid under a pavilion of cloth of gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess of Venus, commonly drawn in picture; and hard by her, pretty fair boys apparelled as painters do set forth god Cupid, with little fans in their hands, with the which they fanned wind upon her. Her ladies and gentlewomen also (which are the mermaids of the waters) and like the Graces; some steering the helm, others tending the tackle and ropes of the barge, out of the which there came a wonderful passing sweet savour of perfumes, that perfumed the wharf's side, pestered with innumerable multitudes of people . . . Antonius was left post alone in the market-place, in his imperial seat, to give audience: and there went a rumour in the people's mouths, that the goddess Venus was come to play with the god Bacchus, for the general good of all Asia.

This polished sliver becomes pure gold in the great speech which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Enobarbus (himself largely Shakespeare's creation) when he is alone with Maecenas and Agrippa (II. ii. 195):

<sup>41</sup> K. Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, Vol. I, pp. 206ff.

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,  
 Burn'd on the water. The poop was beaten gold ;  
 Purple the sails, and so perfumed that  
 The winds were love-sick with them ; the oars were silver.  
 Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made  
 The water which they beat to follow faster,  
 As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,  
 It beggar'd all description. She did lie  
 In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold, of tissue,  
 O'erpicturing that Venus where we see  
 The fancy out-work nature. On each side her  
 Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,  
 With divers-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem  
 To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,  
 And what they undid did . . .  
 Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,  
 So many mermaids, tended her i' th' eyes.  
 And made their bends adornings. At the helm  
 A seeming mermaid steers. The silken tackle  
 Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands  
 That yarely frame the office. From the barge  
 A strange invisible perfume hits the sense  
 Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast  
 Her people out upon her ; and Antony,  
 Enthron'd i' th' market-place, did sit alone,  
 Whistling to th' air ; which, but for vacancy,  
 Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,  
 And make a gap in nature.

This transfiguration of emotive prose into transcendent poetry is a glory that defies analysis or explication. There are additional touches like "the winds were love-sick with them", "amorous of their strokes", "beggar'd all description", "tended her i' th' eyes,/And made their bends adornings", Antony "whistling to the air", and, of course, the tremendous opening and close. Nine words in the original — 'nymphs Nereids (which are the mermaids of the waters)' — are compacted into the four words 'Nereides,/So many mermaids'; 'pretty fair boys' becomes 'pretty dimpled boys'; and 'a wonderful passing sweet savour of perfumes' becomes 'a strange invisible perfume' (three words less, and far more vivid). The winds are love-sick, the water is amorous, the air itself would fain gaze on Cleopatra. All Nature has fallen for Cleopatra ; what chance, then, for Antony to resist manifest Venus' charms ?

The timing of Enobarbus' speech in the play has the stroke of fatality. Hearing of his wife Fulvia's death and of Pompey's moves, Antony has hurried from Alexandria to Rome. What begins as a tense scene between Caesar and Antony relaxes gradually, thanks to the mediators Lepidus, Agrippa and Enobarbus. Now Agrippa comes forward with the proposal that Antony, being a widower, should marry Caesar's sister, Octavia (herself a widow). When Caesar sarcastically mentions Cleopatra, Antony answers simply, "I am not married, Caesar". So the marriage is arranged, and amity seems to be restored (II. ii. 150) :

*Antony.* Let me have thy hand.  
Further this act of grace ; and from this hour  
The heart of brothers govern in our loves  
And sway our great designs.

*Caesar.* There is my hand.  
A sister I bequeath you, whom no brother  
Did ever love so dearly. Let her live  
To join our kingdoms and our hearts.

The triumvirs leave, and the 'smaller fry' are left behind. One thought is uppermost in their minds : Will Antony now give up Cleopatra ? Here in Rome, in the midst of diplomatic negotiations and on the eve of a possible bloody engagement with Pompey, these veteran soldiers and politicians cannot take their minds off Cleopatra. As Enobarbus recalls the vision of Cleopatra on the river Cydnus, it is as though she fills the present scene, as *champak* odour from the garden wafted by a wayward breeze fills a distant room. How about the proposed marriage, then ? When Maecenas says, "Now Antony must leave her utterly", with a metallic fatalistic clang comes Enobarbus' answer (II. ii. 238) :

Never ! He will not.  
Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies ; for vilest things  
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests  
Bless her when she is riggish.

As against the lure of Cleopatra's waywardness and wantonness, her variety and contrariety, Octavia can offer "beauty, wisdom, modesty". Can even such a paragon "settle the heart" of the man who said (I. i. 33) :

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch  
Of the rang'd empire fall ! Here is my space.  
Kingdoms are clay ; our duny earth alike  
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life  
Is to do thus (*embracing Cleopatra*). when such a mutual pair  
And such a twain can do't . . .

But the same Antony had said not long afterwards (I. ii. 113) :

These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,  
Or lose myself in dotage.

(The first line in the play, spoken by Philo, also refers to "this dotage of our general's".) Again, after hearing of Fulvia's death, —

I must from this enchanting queen break off.  
Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,  
My idleness doth hatch.

It is thus clear that it is not mere policy, it is also an effort of will, that makes Antony eager to marry Octavia and save himself from Cleopatra's enchantments and the giddiness, lassitude and dotage of Alexandria. Historically, Antony does succeed in breaking the "Egyptian fetters" as if for ever : but in Shakespeare's play the illusion is created that Antony returns to Cleopatra almost on the morrow of his marriage to Octavia. Still in Rome — having apparently only moved from Lepidus' to Caesar's house — Antony meets a soothsayer, and after a brief exchange with him says with finality (II. iii. 39) :

I will to Egypt ;  
And though I make this marriage for my peace,  
I' th' East my pleasure lies.

The other half of the reason is his uncasiness (we should call it inferiority complex now) in the presence of the masterful Caesar who is hardly more than half Antony's age (II. iii. 34ff). In II. vi, again, Enobarbus tells Menas (Pompey's friend) that although Octavia is "of a holy, cold, and still conversation", Antony will to his "Egyptian dish" again. And when that happens — as happen it must — Antony and Octavius would be more at variance than ever. Enobarbus is a minor Tiresias who sees all and can prevent nothing. That is to be *his* tragedy. ✓✓

"The duel between Antony and Octavius", says Peter Alexander, "repeats in a more spacious theatre that between Richard and Bolingbroke. Richard throws away a kingdom, while Antony squanders an empire". But at least Antony makes a deliberate choice in favour of an order of experience whose value (along with its limitations) he knows. Doesn't Antony shy away from Octavius as much as, like iron, he irresistibly feels drawn to the Egyptian magnet? Bradley writes: "Octavius is very formidable. His cold determination half paralyses Antony; it is so even in *Julius Caesar*". More significantly, A. L. Rowse sees in the Antony-Octavius struggle a reflection of the Essex-Raleigh rivalry: "An inside knowledge of the faction-fighting upon the Elizabethan political scene has gone into the writing of *Antony and Cleopatra*". And there is, perhaps, a hint of Bacon, who abandons Essex when the tide of fortune turns against him, in the Enobarbus who moves over to Octavius—but, then, Enobarbus redeems himself in the end which Bacon does not. The shifts in scene, action and characterisation are so swift that, challenged to describe the effect of the play on us, we can only think of the modern cinema with its blinding mixture of light and shade and tremendous contrapuntal organisation.

*Antony and Cleopatra* defies, of course, any trite summing-up. Brandes has called it "a world-catastrophe". The action ranges from continent to continent, and comprises land and sea; and once Antony says (IV. x. 3) that he would fight in the fire or the air too! There are 42 scenes long and short,—some of 10 lines, 9 lines, 5 lines, and 4 lines. Antony has played as he pleased with "half the bulk o' th' world . . . / Making and marring fortunes" (III. xi. 64). It has been computed that the word 'world' occurs no less than 42 times in the course of the play—twice as often as in any other play. Diplomacy, war on land and sea, calculation, meanness, magnanimity, treachery, sensuality, heroism—all are here. The 'dramatis personae' is one of the most populous in the Canon. The political and personal issue between Antony and Caesar: the tempestuous passions that now sunder and now unite Antony and Cleopatra: the storm in Antony's mind and heart, the pull between honour, Rome, heroism and the dream of Empire on the one hand, and love, Alexandria, sensuality and the dream of Infinity on the other: the fear in Antonio's soul that he may lose Cleopatra's love, in hers that he may

abandon her, and the fear in them both that they may be trapped into outliving their love in dishonour and shame — these several outer and inner tensions, like the strings of a tuned instrument, make the music of the play. Through the accumulation of an immense variety of scene, action and character, and by including in the 'action' all the vicissitudes inexorably leading to the triumphant double-victory at the Monument, Shakespeare has made *Antony and Cleopatra* a panoramic display that creates the impression that kingdoms are but clay, political rivalries mere folly, and only sensual love climaxing in its own death and transcendence the only reality.

As we pass from Act I to Act II, we see Antony in dotage shaking off his fetters and making a new start in life. From III. i to III. vi we see the new compact breaking. In III. i we learn from Ventidius, who has won the campaign in Syria on Antony's behalf, that the latter will proceed to Athens. In III. iv, which opens in Athens, Antony sends Octavia back to Rome to try to patch up the differences between her husband and her brother. The wars between Caesar and Pompey, and Caesar and Lepidus, — the events of a couple of years, — are merely reported in III. v. In the next scene, Caesar reports to Agrippa and Maecenas that Antony is back in Alexandria, now more than ever in shackles to Cleopatra's charms. Octavia's earlier successful attempt at mediation (37 B.C.) is skipped by Shakespeare, for when Octavia arrives in Rome (as from Athens : III. iv), the stage is already set for an open clash between Antony and Caesar. III. vii opens in Antony's camp close to the promontory near Actium, and we have now skipped some years, and we are on the eve of the decisive Battle of Actium (31 B.C.).

Even now, if Antony can campaign without being distracted by Cleopatra, all will be well, but she will not listen to Enobarbus' advice (III. vii. 10). With Cleopatra by his side, Antony's better judgement leaves him. Against the advice of his friends, he decides to fight Caesar by sea thereby throwing away (as Enobarbus warns him) "the absolute soldiership you have by land". An unnamed soldier too pleads with Antony (III. vii. 61) :

O noble Emperor, do not fight by sea ;  
Trust not to rotten planks. Do you misdoubt  
This sword as these my wounds ? Let th' Egyptians

And the Phoenicians go a-ducking; we  
 Have us'd to conquer standing on the earth  
 And fighting foot to foot.

In vain! Caesar, on the contrary, keeps his head cool. He knows where his strength lies. The sea fight proves a fiasco: the Egyptian ships turn tail, and Antony (III. x. 20)

like a doating mallard,  
 Leaving the fight in height, flies after her . .  
 Experience, manhood, honour, ne'er before  
 Did violate so itself.

This is the signal for Antony's legions under Canidius to surrender to Caesar, following the lead of six kings who have already so yielded to him. Having lost almost all, Antony resolves upon a course (evidently suicide: III. xi. 9) that has no need of others, and so he asks his friends to "let that be left/Which leaves itself". On Cleopatra telling him that, although *she* turned away from the battle, she didn't expect *him* to follow, he answers (III. xi. 56):

Egypt, thou knew'st too well  
 My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings,  
 And thou shouldst tow me after. O'er my spirit  
 Thy full supremacy thou knew'st, and that  
 Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods  
 Command me.

Infatuation? Dotage? Fatality? But there are no recriminations, for Antony presently adds:

Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates  
 All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss;  
 Even this repays me.

What is this Calculus that equates a tear and a kiss with all 'honour' lost, and all the 'world' lost? Caesar's 'terms' are brutal: he will not allow Antony to live even as "a private man in Athens". As for Cleopatra, if she will drive away Antony from Egypt "or take his life there", she can hope for lenient terms. While "Think, and die" is Enobarbus' prescription (III. xiii. 1), Antony sends a challenge to Caesar that they should engage in single fight "sword against sword, ourselves alone",

— which makes Enobarbus conclude that Caesar has subdued Antony's judgement too! When presently Caesar's emissary, Thyrus, tries to kiss Cleopatra's hand as she extends it to him, Antony enters in boiling rage and has him properly whipped and storms at Cleopatra for mingling eyes with one that ties the 'points' of Caesar. His jealous fury assures Cleopatra that he still passionately cares for her, while her brief explanation "Not know me yet?" and the torrential speech (III. xiii. 158ff) that follows convince him that her heart is his alone. Like the Dalila episode in *Samson Agonistes* which provokes the blind defeated hero to action at last, this Thyreus interlude too is the spark necessary to give Antony a new spurt of life as lover and fighter. He might go down still, but it would at least be with the after-glow of the setting Sun. He decides to give fight to Caesar again —

I will be treble-sinew'd, hearted, breath'd,  
And fight maliciously.

A night of revelry follows, the last of many such gaudy nights; they celebrate Cleopatra's birthday with wine peeping through the sears. But Antony's words and actions, though they breathe defiance, are inly charged with fatality. At night the soldiers imagine (IV. iii. 16) that "the god Hercules, whom Antony lov'd, / Now leaves him". In IV. vii and viii, Antony fights gloriously and achieves his rehabilitation; Caesar himself is beaten to his camp, and Antony's soldiers "have shown all Hector's". But the next day shows that this is but a false dawn, only the last flicker of the flame before it dies out suddenly. In the sea-fight Cleopatra's ships surrender to the enemy, and thinking that she has "pack'd cards with Caesar, and false-play'd my glory / Unto an enemy's triumph" (IV. xiv. 19), Antony vents his fury in a mere whirl of words, and vows that he would be revenged on "this foul Egyptian . . . triple-turned whore . . . this false soul of Egypt".

The military campaign is over. The rest of the drama resolves itself into a triangular struggle between Antony, Cleopatra and Caesar, into which they throw all their passion, poetry, cunning and calculation, each trying to get even with the other two. When Antony rails in a frenzy against Cleopatra, she locks herself up in the Monument (the Tomb she had caused to be made) on her maid Charmian's advice and sends word that she is dead.



This news stuns Antony, but also gives him infinite relief. The battle may be lost, but *she* hasn't gone over to Caesar. There are no more regrets, and there is nothing more to live for. He tells his faithful servant (IV. xiv. 35):

Unarm, Eros; the long day's task is done,  
And we must sleep.

Alone for a little while, Antony reveals this calm lucidity of mind:

I'll o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and  
Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now  
All length is torture. Since the torch is out,  
Lie down, and stray no farther. Now all labour  
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles  
Itself with strength. Seal then, and all is done.

Eros, bidden by Antony to kill him, kills himself instead; and so Antony falls on his own sword. The Guards who arrive exchange significant comments: 'The star is fallen'; 'And time is at its period'! When he learns that Cleopatra is not dead after all, he is content to accept this fact too; 'tis better as it is. He is carried to the Monument, and as the fateful pair meet for the last time words wing themselves aloft achieving the utter imaginative reality of poetry (IV. xv):

*Cleopatra.* O sun,  
Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in! Darkling stand  
The varying shore o' th' world. O Antony,  
*Antony.* Antony! ...  
*Antony.* I am dying, Egypt, dying; only  
I here importune death awhile, until  
Of many thousand kisses the poor last  
I lay upon thy lips.

But to come down she dares not, for she may be surprised and taken prisoner by Caesar's men. Not that she will submit even then—if "knife, drugs, serpents, have edge, sting, or operation"! So Antony is lifted up to Cleopatra. The reconciliation is complete and final. As he dies, Cleopatra sings her dirge—

Noblest of men, woo't die?  
Hast thou no care of me? Shall I abide  
In this dull world ...

(*Antony dies.*)

The crown o' th' earth doth melt. My lord !  
 O, wither'd is the garland of the war,  
 The soldier's pole is fall'n . . .

She is for a while a mere woman, giving vent to tears and swooning, as if she is but "the maid that milks / And does the meanest chares". But the queen soon asserts herself. She rejects 'patience' as sottish and 'impatience' as foolish. She knows what she must do :

Our lamp is spent, it's out ! Good sirs, take heart.  
 We'll bury him ; and then, what's brave, what's noble,  
 Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,  
 And make death proud to take us.

Antony has deprived Caesar of his cheap personal (apart from the general political) triumph ; he has won Cleopatra again, and for all time. A double personal victory, this, for Antony. Now remains the battle of wiles between Cleopatra who has lost all and Caesar who has gained all. Act V is thus no anti-climax but the necessary conclusion of the Romantic action. When Caesar receives news of Antony's death, he speaks the appropriate words (V. i. 14), but his emotions, though they find lofty words, do not weaken his main resolution : he must take Cleopatra captive to Rome ! Her first attempt at suicide is foiled by Proculelus. She talks ecstatically of Antony to Dolabella (V. ii. 76ff). Caesar himself arrives and offers her sugar plums with the mailed fist held in reserve. But she is not deceived, she quite sees through him. Left alone with her maids, —

*Cleopatra.* He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not  
 Be noble to myself . . .

*Iras.* Finish, good lady ; the bright day is done,  
 And we are for the dark . . .

*Cleopatra.* I have spoke already, and it is provided ;  
 Go put it to the haste.

It is Caesar that is deceived. By her seeming anxiety to retain some of her jewellery, she has made him feel that she is eager to live and thrive after a fashion. But now she attires herself, as if "again for Cyndus / To meet Mark Antony". The Clown, as arranged, comes with a basket of figs. The conversation that follows between Cleopatra and the Clown — like Hamlet's collo-

quy with the grave-diggers — has been cited as an instance of what Maynard Mack calls the central dialogue of the tragic experience :

"Shakespeare objectifies it for us on his stage by the encounter of those by whom. 'changed, changed utterly', a terrible beauty has been born, with those who are still players in life's casual comedy".<sup>42</sup>

This 'comic relief' is the needed prelude to the climactic scene that follows (V. ii. 278):

Give me my robe, put on my crown ; I have  
Immortal longings in me. Now no more  
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.  
Yare, yare, good Iras ; quick. Methinks I hear  
Antony call. I see him rouse himself  
To praise my noble act. I hear him mock  
The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men  
To excuse after their wrath. Husband, I come.  
Now to that name my courage prove my title !  
I am fire and air ; my other elements  
I give to baser life ...<sup>43</sup>

Irás dies first, having applied the asp earlier ; and, both taken aback and deeply touched, Cleopatra continues :

If thou and nature can so gently part,  
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch.  
Which hurts and is desir'd ...  
*(To an asp, which she applies to her breast.)*  
With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate  
Of life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,  
Be angry, and dispatch. O couldst thou speak.  
That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass  
Unpolitic !

So sets the Eastern star, and Charmian, unwilling to survive the "lass unparallel'd", applies an asp and dies just when the guard rushes in, followed presently by Dolabella, Caesar and all his Train. Caesar, as is appropriate, speaks the last word :

<sup>42</sup> *Jacobean Shakespeare* (Ed. by J. R. Brown and Bernard Harris), p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> In his *All for Love*, Dryden elaborates "Husband, I come./Now to that name my courage prove my title" into —

I have not loved a Roman, not to know  
What should become his wife ; his wife, my Charmian !  
For 'tis to that high title I aspire.

she looks like sleep,  
 As she would catch another Antony  
 In her strong toil of grace ...  
 She shall be buried by her Antony;  
 No grave upon the earth shall clip in it  
 A pair so famous ...

We might well ask: Death, where is thy sting? Caesar, where is thy victory?

Shakespeare obviously set himself an impossible task when he wrote *Antony and Cleopatra*. The issue is supposed to be love against honour (or duty), but whereas Dryden in his *All for Love* treats it logically with but a touch of poetry here and there, Shakespeare dares to reverse the accepted priorities by giving his hero and heroine dimensions other than those of worldly wisdom, cool calculation or moral correctness. Donald A. Stauffer declares that the writing of the play itself constitutes "a moral act of judgement", and he adds further:

"Deliberately he (Shakespeare) takes four steps: he must demonstrate that 'reason' is mistaken; he must belittle or blacken the cause of empire; he must make passion larger than the world; and he must spiritualise and ennoble an historical liaison until it appears as the true quality of love".<sup>44</sup>

But this "moral act of judgement" could not 'bounce' us as it does were it not for the poetry, for the poetry is the play, and it nearly — if not quite — annihilates our mere judgement. The characters, says Dowden, "insinuate themselves through the senses, trouble the blood, ensnare the imagination, invade our whole being like colour or like music. The figures dilate to proportions greater than human, and are seen through a golden haze of sensuous splendour".<sup>45</sup> What chance is there for the intellect to formulate the moral issue and to clarify our response to it? *Antony and Cleopatra* has been called 'a problem play' because we are thus ill at ease when we approach it intellectually.<sup>46</sup> Are

<sup>44</sup> *Shakespeare's World of Images*, p. 234.

<sup>45</sup> *Shakespeare: His Mind and Art*, p. 307.

<sup>46</sup> See Ernest Schanzer's *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (1963). Schanzer argues that whereas in *Julius Caesar* the 'conspiracy' is subordinated to Brutus' own tragic experience and in *Measure for Measure* Isabella's 'choice' is likewise subordinated to the wider theme of Justice and Mercy, in *Antony and Cleopatra* the 'love-relationship' predominates over the play's other concerns; thus *Antony and Cleopatra* "is by far the greatest, as well as the most quintessential, of Shakespeare's Problem Plays" (p. 183).

we meant to condemn the lovers? Or applaud them? Or merely to suspend judgement? Judgement is in any case rendered impossible by the intoxication of the poetry. We acquire as it were a double vision, and we see that when Antony and Cleopatra embrace death it comes to them, not so much as a punishment, but as the fulfilment or the apotheosis of their love. Isn't our admiration for the lovers a little 'flawed' because of the paradox implied in the largely self-forged path of destruction which by the grandeur of the final act gives annihilation itself the glow of resurrection? Why is the play both the tragedy of the lovers and their supreme triumph? Antony and Cleopatra reach a point when only in death they can achieve a union that is beyond the vicissitudes of jealousy, uncertainty, regret, and fear. For Antony who has declined to dotage, the end signifies a measure of renewal and the triumphant facing of the unescapable fact. For Cleopatra who has after a life-time of coquetry, contrariety and sensuality learned at last the meaning of the Absolute that is Love, her death is a vindication of her whole variegated and maddening life: for in her end is all her yesterdays, and the serpent of the Nile has been transformed into the Phoenix, the rare Arabian bird, who has gone up in a tongue of mutual flame with the turtle, her sovereign Antony. On the other hand, their story considered in broad relation to the human condition, may be made to yield another meaning as well: not quite contradicting the first but in a significant way qualifying it. "In *Antony and Cleopatra*", says L. C. Knights, "the sense of potentiality in life's untutored energies is pushed to its limit, and Shakespeare gives the maximum weight to an experience that is finally 'placed'".<sup>47</sup> The poetry may transport Antony and Cleopatra to a world where they are beyond our judgement, but even the poetry doesn't invest sexual passion as such with complete autonomy. The lovers are enfranchised by death, but their experience is 'placed' after being separated from them. While it is true that neither Antony nor Cleopatra has finally let humankind down, it is no less true that the price of their victory is their tragic self-immolation. To escape the judgement 'here', they have had to leap across mortality. The courage of their taking-off constitutes their glory, while the necessity to make the leap defines their limitation.

<sup>47</sup> *Some Shakespearean Themes*, p. 149.

## IV

## CORIOLANUS

The last of Shakespeare's tragedies, *Coriolanus* puzzles us sufficiently to provoke us into pushing it also among the 'problem plays'. The hero's 'humour' (or tragic flaw) is supposed to be 'pride': his enemies (notably the two tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus) repeatedly say so. But in the opening scene itself we find him ready enough to serve under Cominius (I. i. 236); and he is willing to be guided by Menenius, his friend, and to be dominated by his mother, Volumnia. Is Coriolanus' 'flaw', then, an excessive regard for the Patrician class and a like contempt for the Plebians? This is obvious too, though he feels later that the nobles also have let him down. Is his 'flaw' an inordinate hankering after 'honour'—a passion commensurate with Hotspur's in *1 Henry IV*? Although as a patriotic Roman Caius Marcius (Coriolanus) fights Rome's enemies, the Volscians, there is also an element of sheerly personal rivalry (recalling again that between Hotspur and Prince Hal) between Coriolanus and the Volscian general, Tullus Aufidius. This rivalry is something wholly irrational, transcending the needs of the political and military situation; and looking for comparisons we may recall the rivalry between Hector and Achilles (in the *Iliad*), Karna and Arjuna or Duryodhana and Bhima (in the *Mahabharata*), or even the monumental spite with which Captain Ahab pursues the White Whale in Melville's great novel, *Moby Dick*. Quite early in the play we find Marcius saying about Aufidius (I. i. 227):

Tullus Aufidius ...  
 I sin in envying his nobility;  
 And were I anything but what I am,  
 I would wish me only he ...  
 Were half to half the world by th' ears, and he  
 Upon my party, I'd revolt, to make  
 Only my wars with him. He is a lion  
 That I am proud to hunt.

(While Aufidius is a 'lion', the plebians are but curs, hares, foxes, geese, and dogs—I. i. 166ff.) Later in the course of the battle he pleads with Cominius (I. vi. 55):

I do beseech you ...  
 Set me against Aufidius and his Antiates;  
 And that you not delay the present ...

When the rivals meet on the field of battle (I. viii), they exchange hot blows and hotter words. Aufidius is beaten back, Corioli is taken, and Marcius is hailed as 'Coriolanus' or 'the Victor of Corioli' (I. ix. 64). But what are Aufidius' sentiments? He now despairs of getting even with Coriolanus in fair fight (I. x. 7):

Five times, Marcius,  
 I have fought with thee; so often hast thou beat me;  
 And wouldst do so, I think, should we encounter  
 As often as we eat. By th' elements,  
 If e'er again I meet him beard to beard,  
 He's mine or I am his. Mine emulation  
 Has not that honour in't it had; for where  
 I thought to crush him in an equal force,  
 True sword to sword, I'll potch at him some way.  
 Or wrath or craft may get him.

While the citizens think that Coriolanus is the chief enemy of the people (I. i. 6) and the Tribunes are determined somehow to thwart him, by the end of Act I it is clear who the real 'opposites' are. Aufidius may be a 'man of straw' (Bradley's phrase), and in a halting soliloquy like the above Shakespeare's full force of language hardly comes out. But in the plotting of the play Aufidius is given the key role. Coriolanus dies in the end, not so much because of his character or his career, "but because Aufidius hates him".<sup>48</sup>

The clue to Coriolanus' life is that, like Lear, he too but slenderly knows himself, and his noble qualities, lacking the poise of reason and humanity, are apt to side-track him on the least provocation. He doesn't like to hear himself praised, nor to receive any special reward for his services (I. ix. 36). These are very much to his credit. His pride is really defective self-knowledge, while his quick temper is more self-defeating than dangerous to others. His impressive antecedents are in a way admitted by the Tribunes themselves (II. iii. 234):<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare*, p. 245.

<sup>49</sup> One of the ironies in Shakespeare, like Iago lecturing on 'Good name in man and woman' (*Othello*, III. iii. 159ff).

what stock he springs of —  
 The noble house o' th' Marcians; from whence came  
 That Ancus Marcius, Numa's daughter's son,  
 Who, after great Hostilius, here was king;  
 Of the same house Publius and Quintus were,  
 That our best water brought hy conduits here ...

It is thus not any natural want of endowment, any hereditary defect, but defective upbringing that causes the 'flaw' in Coriolanus' character. This point is stressed by Plutarch himself who says that, being left an orphan by his father, his widow stirred up Marcius' natural wit and great heart to notable acts of courage:

"But on the other side, for lack of education, he was so choleric and impatient, that he would yield to no living creature; which made him churlish, uncivil and altogether unfit for any man's conversation".

Shakespeare too makes it clear that Volumnia is not a little responsible for the imbalance in her son's deportment. More than even he, *she* is ambitious on his behalf, and there is an occasional element of inhumanity in her words to (or about) him. For example, she tells Virgilia, Coriolanus' wife (I. iii. 22):

Hear me profess sincerely: had I a dozen sons, each in my love alike, and none less dear than thine and my good Marcius, I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action.

A masterful woman, she too but slenderly knows her son; what a contrast are they ('this double Lucifer', Middleton Murry calls them) to the quiet womanly woman, the angelic wife, Coriolanus' "gracious silence"! <sup>50</sup> Volumnia is in no small measure the architect of her son's tragedy — O the pity of it! She is her son's fate, just as Gertrude is *her* son's, for the dominating good mother can ruin a son as much as the incestuous bad mother. The Tribunes, of course, are foxy creatures, — willing to wound but afraid to strike, — they are (to pursue the comparison) Corio-

<sup>50</sup> II. i. 166. On his return as victorious Coriolanus, he greets his wife as "My gracious silence, hail!" Ellis-Fermor's comment on this is most perceptive: "(the words) may well be the only overt expression in the play of two things deeply hidden in the mind of Coriolanus, of a longing for the balancing silences, graces, and wisdom banished from the outer world but vital to wholeness of life, and an acknowledgement, albeit inarticulate, that in Virgilia these values were preserved" (*Shakespeare the Dramatist*, p. 74).



lanus' Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but grown older, foxier, and more unscrupulous, — and they take full advantage of Coriolanus' weaknesses (and the weakness in his very strength) to thwart and drive him to ruin. So Coriolanus the sword-arm of Rome against the constant Volscian menace, — Coriolanus the pride of Volumnia, — is provoked, maddened, and banished. In his Himalayan resentment he decides to make common cause with his enemy Aufidius and the Volscians, the scourge of Rome. "A nobler soul", says Duthie, "would still have held his country's welfare high enough to prevent him actually leaguings himself with her enemies, and, moreover, with his own former personal enemy". Mad or merely maddened, Coriolanus has transferred to Rome his earlier limitless resentment towards Aufidius. Nothing less than Rome's utter humiliation will now satisfy him. Neither his former chief, Cominius, nor his esteemed friend, Menenius, is able to deflect Coriolanus from his present unnatural purpose. But he yields at last to Volumnia's powerful plea (and *her* unnatural act of supplication before her son) and tries to make honourable peace between Rome and the Volscians. This, however, gives his old enemy the desired opportunity to strike — and so Coriolanus' race is quickly run. He is "the most noble corse" now; and even Aufidius, his rage subsided, says that he is "struck with sorrow" and promises that Coriolanus shall have a "noble memory".

What are we to make of this play? As poetry, there is a falling off from *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, but the verse is distinguished throughout and is often rhetorically brilliant, and at least once (in the climactic Volumnia scene: V.iii) reaches great heights. The play is dominated by the hero, even more absolutely than *Hamlet* is by the Prince of Denmark. But what is the role of politics in the play? Appearances notwithstanding, it would be wrong to call it in any special sense a political play. War and politics constitute the background, but the crucial invisible struggle rages within the mind and soul of the hero. But as T. J. B. Spencer has noted, except on two occasions (II. iii. 110ff and IV. iv. 12ff), "we are never made free of Coriolanus' mind, as we are with Shakespeare's other tragic heroes".<sup>51</sup> While on the one hand it is true that, not a political problem, but an individual destiny is the theme of the play, it is no less true that

<sup>51</sup> *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* (1963), p. 42.

we are not intimate with Coriolanus in the sense we are intimate with a Hamlet, a Lear, an Antony, or even a Macbeth. In Plutarch's 'parallel lives' of the Greeks and the Romans, the Roman Coriolanus matches with the Greek Alcibiades. Having presented the latter in *Timon of Athens*, and perhaps being dissatisfied with it, Shakespeare returned to the theme again in *Coriolanus*. But although Shakespeare took the story from Plutarch, Shakespeare has played down the sharp political issues — the plebians' secession from Rome (which occasioned Menenius' 'Parable of the Belly', now figuring in I. i. 94ff), the corn-rising, the political conflict in Rome after Coriolanus' banishment — and translated them rather into personal antipathies. In Shakespeare, the Tribunes and the common people reject (and banish) Coriolanus, not because of any specific material wrong he has done them, but because of his haughtiness, pride, insulting language and needlessly aggressive gestures. The usurious Senators 'banish' Alcibiades, who has fought their battles; the Tribunes and the people 'banish' Coriolanus, who has fought Rome's battles. The ingratitude of sundry individuals towards Timon is personal, while the ingratitude of the Senators towards Alcibiades and the people towards Coriolanus is something collective. Timon turns against all humanity, and Athenian humankind most of all, while Alcibiades decides that he would teach Athens a lesson: likewise Coriolanus wills the destruction of Rome. Where a collectivity makes a wrong push simply on the strength of numbers, there is both cowardice and vindictiveness in the action. The Roman citizens, like the Athenian Senators, do not like to feel indebted to one nobler or taller than themselves: having made use of an Alcibiades or a Coriolanus, they give him a bad name and cast him aside — as we throw away an orange after squeezing out the juice. This sort of collective ingratitude is common enough in modern democracies, and with our system of elections the acerbities are so diffused that the possibility of outrageous criminal action are minimised. The unpopular leader loses an election or sits with the Opposition: there is no banishment: and the provocation of collective ingratitude is seldom so strong as to drive the fallen leader to extremes as, for example, Alcibiades and Coriolanus are driven. But Shakespeare saw further than his contemporaries. Although he took his themes from the early days of the city states of Greece and Rome, he has

been able to view them in their utter universality, and thus the usurious Senators and Alcibiades and the self-righteous Tribunes and Coriolanus have their counterparts in political caucuses and the rare upright men who become the victims of caucus machinations and worked-up mob hysteria or organised political goondaism. In *Coriolanus*, individual citizens — or citizens when they are by themselves — talk shrewdly, soberly, intelligently, exhibiting humour, liveliness and all the humane virtues, as for example in II. iii :

- 1 *Citizen*. Once, if he do require our voices, we ought not to deny him.
- 2 *Citizen*. We may, sir, if we will.
- 3 *Citizen*. We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do ; for if show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them ; so, if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them. Ingratitude is monstrous, and for the multitude to be ingrateful were to make a monster of the multitude ; of the which we being members should bring ourselves to be monstrous members.

It is when they are craftily or diabolically led (or misled) from behind the scenes that the worst in them comes out. In society as it is constituted, the best could sometimes be baited, slandered, provoked, maddened, and driven to self-destruction, with the 'foxy' caucus seizing the reins of effective power and using it to their own advantage.

Shakespeare's choice of the career of Coriolanus as the theme of his play was, as pointed out by T. J. B. Spencer, "more of a deliberate and artistic choice than either of the other two Roman plays . . . Dozens of poetasters could write plays on Julius Caesar or Cleopatra. Dozens did. But to write *Coriolanus* was one of the great feats of historical imagination in Renaissance Europe".<sup>52</sup> It is obvious, then, that Shakespeare wrote it in no cavalier mood merely to escape boredom or as an exercise in rhetoric, as suggested by Lytton Strachey :

"... in the play he has given us, the situations, mutilated and degraded, serve merely as miserable props for the gorgeous clothing of his rhetoric.

<sup>52</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 10 (1957), pp. 34-5.

For rhetoric, enormously magnificent and extraordinarily elaborate, is the beginning and the middle and the end of *Coriolanus*".<sup>53</sup>

Two problems taxed Shakespeare almost incessantly: sex and war, lust in the name of love and butchery in the name of war. One lunacy was as destructive as the other; one as common, and indeed as necessary, as the other. And so the impulses behind sex and strife had somehow to be tamed, made to submit to rules, and subjected to 'order'. The riot of sensuality and the thrill of warfare are intoxicating lures, and they can become frenzies, blinding us, creating a confusion between 'ends' and 'means', perverting our movements, deadening our judgements. Ultimately sensuality and war become 'ends' in themselves; and even though there may be a kind of bravado and recklessness and even glory in the sensuality of a Cleopatra or the heroism of a Coriolanus, Shakespeare would have us, in our better judgement, 'place' them in the general context of human well-being. When Antony and Cleopatra have gone as far as they have done, the only glory that they may hope for is in facing the fact and nobly dying. When Coriolanus has allowed himself to be trapped in the situation in which he finds himself, to go ahead and to bring Rome to her knees would be to imperil his immortal soul, while to go back would be to disappoint his new-found friends (the Volscians) in whom he has raised such high expectations. Greatness alone is not enough, the more's the pity; just as patriotism alone is not enough. What makes Coriolanus great also makes him 'impossible'—just as, in other circumstances, a Jesus was 'impossible', or a Mahatma Gandhi was 'impossible'. When Coriolanus rushed alone into Corioli in dare-devil fashion, he might have been overwhelmed and killed, as Abhimanyu was outnumbered and killed in the Mahabharata war. In their mob frenzy the Romans might have hurled Coriolanus down from the Tarpeian Rock. Even had he not yielded to Volumnia, once Rome fell, Aufidius might have paid off old scores and brought about Coriolanus' fall (IV. vii. 56):

When, Caius, Rome is thine,  
Thou art poor'st of all; then shortly art thou mine.

<sup>53</sup> *Literary Essays*, pp. 4-5.

While yielding to Volumnia, Coriolanus has enough pre-vision to say (V. iii. 185) :

O my mother, mother ! O !  
 You have won a happy victory to Rome ;  
 But for your son—believe it, O, believe it !—  
 Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,  
 If not most mortal to him. But let it come.

It comes ; he is ready. For him, as for Hamlet, and the other tragic heroes (even Macbeth), the readiness is all.

While *Coriolanus*, seen from one point of view, is "a masterpiece of construction", for it is marked by a classical restraint and there are no distracting sub-plots",<sup>54</sup> when we view it in relation to the hero's character alone it seems to be (in this resembling *Timon*) two plays uneasily joined in the middle. The scion of a noble house, a fighter, a patriot, how is it that Coriolanus becomes—as it were overnight—a fury, a scourge, an evil destiny? The magnanimous Timon becomes the misanthrope ; the Saviour of Rome threatens to become its destroyer ; we are shown the cataclysmic changes, but we are not permitted to see the wires, the machinery, the process of change. We can make a guess, of course, as Bradley does :

"As time passes, and no suggestion of recall reaches Coriolanus, and he learns what it is to be a solitary homeless exile, his heart hardens, his pride swells to a mountainous bulk, and the wound in it becomes a fire . . . Here in solitude he can find no relief in a storm of words ; but gradually the blind intolerable chaos of resentment conceives and gives birth to a vision, not merely of battle and indiscriminate slaughter, but of the whole city one tower of flame. To see that with his bodily eyes would satisfy his soul".<sup>55</sup>

And Bradley adds : "This is Shakespeare's idea, not Plutarch's" ; perhaps we ought to qualify further and say, "It is Bradley's idea, not Shakespeare's", because we have no clue at all to the workings of the hero's mind between IV. i. 51 when he says—

Whiles I remain above the ground you shall  
 Hear from me still, and never of me aught  
 But what is like me formerly—

<sup>54</sup> B. H. Kemball-Cook, Introduction to the *New Clarendon* edition, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1911-12), p. 466.

and IV. iv. 23 when, just before entering Aufidius' house in Antium, Coriolanus, now disguised and muffled and in mean apparel, says :

My birthplace hate I, and my love's upon  
This enemy town. I'll enter. If he slay me,  
He does fair justice : if he give me way,  
I'll do his country service.

Presently he tells Aufidius that (IV. v. 74)

The cruelty and envy of the people,  
Permitted by our dastard nobles, who  
Have all forsook me, hath devour'd the rest,  
And suffer'd me by th' voice of slaves to be  
Whoop'd out of Rome.

And his main desire is "be full quit of those my banishers". There is no doubt about the edge of the resentment, but that it took the form of a fixed desire to burn Rome is not supported by the text. If Cominius reports that Coriolanus said that he couldn't leave a pile unburnt because of "one poor grain or two", or that he "does sit in gold, his eye/Red as 'twould burn Rome" (V. i. 63), surely we are not meant to take these images literally. To ally himself with Rome's enemy and turn against her in a mood of revenge is in all conscience bad enough, and it is not necessary to paint the red picture more crimson still by giving Coriolanus' intention so terrible an aspect as the desire to see with his bodily eyes "the whole city one tower of flame".<sup>56</sup>

In any case, Coriolanus is saved from himself by his mother Volumnia. Shakespeare's poetry keeps on a level with the emotional intensity of the scene.<sup>57</sup> The presence of Aufidius exerts a necessary restraint, for this makes the passion and the poetry all the more tensely vibrant and nobly articulate. The greatest and most fateful of battles is now to be fought in the theatre of Coriolanus' soul. At first he tries to steel his heart (V. iii. 24) :

<sup>56</sup> R. H. Case the editor of the *Arden* edition (1922) also questions Bradley's interpretation : "The idea that Rome will be burnt appears to me to arise as the probable result of a sack and not as an obsession of Coriolanus himself".

<sup>57</sup> For a brilliant analysis of this scene, see H. Heur's article in *Shakespeare Survey* 10, pp. 54ff.

But out, affection !  
 All bond and privilege of nature, break !  
 Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.

Then, after a while, he kneels, — and now Volumnia kneels to her son, reversing the natural order. He is aghast ; but he tries to be firm still, — and then comes Volumnia's long speech beginning with "Nay, go not from us thus", making dramatic references to the other supplicants (Virgilia, Valeria and Young Marcius), mixing emotion with reason, admonition with entreaty, and at last being worked up by Coriolanus' obvious obduracy to fling her final challenge that is defiance doubled with desperation, terror touched with pity (V. iii. 168) :

He turns away.  
 Down, ladies ; let us shame him with our knees.  
 To his surname Coriolanus 'longs more pride  
 Than pity to our prayers. Down. An end ;  
 This is the last. So we will home to Rome,  
 And die among our neighbours. Nay, behold's ! ...  
 This fellow had a Volscean to his mother ;  
 His wife is in Corioli, and his child  
 Like him by chance. Yet give us our despatch.  
 I am hush'd until our city be afire,  
 And then I'll speak a little.

Coriolanus yields, knowing full well what it means. "But let it come", he says as if resigned to the event, even as Hamlet says "Let be". He can make neither true war nor convenient peace ; he has signed his own death-warrant. But no matter ; let it come !

The Volumnia-Coriolanus scene recalls the great scene in the *Mahabharata* in which Kunti the mother of the Pandavas pleads with Karna to stay his hand against them. Karna, her first-born, had been secretly put away and had been brought up humbly and had received Duryodhana's patronage. When the Pandavas declare war against Duryodhana, they are ranged against their own eldest brother Karna, although none of them knows this fact. On the eve of a crucial engagement, Kunti approaches Karna, reveals the truth about his birth, and exhorts him to abandon Duryodhana in favour of the Pandavas. But Karna declines to do so, but promises that he will stay his hand against all except Arjuna ; whether Karna or Arjuna falls in the battle,

there will still be *five* of the brothers left. Kunti's interference, although it is in the larger interests of her clan, proves the undoing of Karna himself. First and last, whether unwittingly or unavoidably, Kunti proves to be her first-born's fatality. One of the many burdens of Karma that she has to bear.

At Rome, it has all ended happily. The patricians can profiteer as before, the Tribunes can harangue as before, the 'leaders' whether by birth or by election knowing uncannily on which side their bread is buttered, and the mere people of course having the worst of it always. Coriolanus is noble but wrong, and pays the supreme penalty; the Senators are suave and calculating, the Tribunes are mean and envious, and they all manage to save their skins. The ambitious Volumnia has played for high stakes, and she can still (even in her misery) pride herself on her son. Only Virgilia the silent wife and Menenius the sweetly reasonable friend are left to bemoan all that has happened: what they had dimly foreseen but couldn't forestall. *Coriolanus* could indeed be read as Shakespeare's political testament, but conveyed not dogmatically but in terms of tragic ambivalence. What fails in the play is not the adequacy of the vision but the power of the poetry to communicate the vision. Patrician, demagogue, soldier, citizen — none comes unscathed from this pitiless probe into the passions, prejudices, ardours and calculations that rule the world of politics. Shakespeare does not take sides in the developing conflict; on the contrary, he weighs all in the same balance and finds them all wanting — but none of the characters, nor any of these classes or groups, is wholly denied understanding or sympathy. For it is a surgical (not a murderous) probe that is effected, informed by love and deep anxiety. Politics are for the moment and tend to divide men. If a King or a Consul is endowed with Power, but Power without Grace, he no doubt becomes a potent danger to the commonalty; but if a whole multitude are collectively endowed with Power — and are collectively incapable of Grace — their rule can become a hideous nightmare. The Volscians change towards Coriolanus hoping to make use of him: the Romans change on account of sheer fright: only Coriolanus changes because his heart is at last touched, his soul is awakened to the promptings of pity, and the engines of his Power are suddenly invaded by Grace. He comes out of the fire purified in heart



and soul. Wood is charred or consumed by fire, but gold is only purified. Coriolanus dies because there is no place in the world for him — no place either at Rome or at Antium. The past is too bitter to be blotted out, the future is too ambiguous. In death only can he wholly rehabilitate himself; only in Death's Other Kingdom can he find the peace that this sullied earth has denied him. More sinned against than sinning, maddened than mad, dead Coriolanus is assured of a noble memory in the glowing pages of Shakespeare.

## V

## SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

As we have seen, the term 'Shakespearian Tragedy' may be made to cover the four supreme tragedies (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*), the four Roman plays (*Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*), the two History plays (*Richard II* and *Richard III*), and the two Mediterranean tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Timon of Athens*. No single formula can comprise all these plays. In his Academy Lecture, Kenneth Muir says :

"If there is one thing that emerges from a study of Shakespeare's twelve tragedies it is that after each masterpiece he wished, in Keats's phrase, to devote himself to other sensations".<sup>58</sup>

Hence it is hazardous to devise a single Procrustean 'pattern' of Shakespearian tragedy. In the appreciation of great literature, to surrender to the itch to describe too narrowly is to miss the essence; but, of course, this goes on all the time. Lily Campbell, in her *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes*, describes *Hamlet* as a tragedy of grief, *Othello* of jealousy, *Lear* of wrath in old age, and *Macbeth* as a study in fear; 'mirrors of passion' are they all. Irving Ribner, in his *Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy*, describes the three early tragedies as Senecan, *Richard II* and

<sup>58</sup> *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. XLIV, 1958, p. 161. In his British Council booklet, *Shakespeare: The Great Tragedies* (1961), Muir says that each play "was an experiment, 'a raid on the inarticulate', and each was designed to bring out the full significance of the theme" (p. 37).

*Julius Caesar* as historical tragedies, *Hamlet* as being built on the pattern of growth, *Othello* and *King Lear* on that of moral choice and regeneration respectively, *Timon* and *Macbeth* as patterning the operation of Evil, and the last two Roman plays as embodying the final paradox that what destroys is also what confers uniqueness or greatness. Duthie thinks that "the fundamental order-disorder theme is found in all the tragedies"; nay more: "In all of his plays he is concerned with the conceptions of order and disorder", the dialectic being order — disorder — restoration of order.<sup>59</sup> Rossiter feels that the tragic includes its apparent opposite also:

"Shakespeare's tragic conception of *order* is mediaeval and Christian; his conception of human *greatness* verges towards the antithesis of goodness in that order, and includes much of what his age called *virtu* ... Here the whole hangs between two poles".<sup>60</sup>

While J. S. Smart thinks that the tragic poet has the power "to suggest something illimitable, to place life against a background of eternity"<sup>61</sup> and Bradley feels that the representation of the 'tragic fact' does not "leave us crushed, rebellious or desperate", Clifford Leech strikes a far more pessimistic note:

"At the end of things, in the ultimate sad analysis, we are not sure what 'greatness' is, we are pitifully aware that our capacity to suffer has a breaking point, that our powers of comprehension are dim. Remnants of old faiths jut out now and then like rocks in a troubled sea, but there is no firm footing on them, and the sea is limitless, the laws of its tides unknown, its winds incalculable. The castaway swims vigorously, scans the encompassing horizon".<sup>62</sup>

Fresh approaches to Shakespearian Tragedy are, of course, constantly being made: Arthur Sewall (*Character and Society in Shakespeare*, 1951) has developed the thesis that the tragic heroes are divers modes of vision and attitudes to life rendered in terms of poetic imagery and speech, each of the heroes being an individual address to the world (that is, to us); William Rosen (*Shakespeare and the Craft of Tragedy*, 1960) contrasts the rehabilitation of *Lear* with the decline of *Macbeth* towards

<sup>59</sup> *Shakespeare*, pp. 186, 54.

<sup>60</sup> *Angel with Horns*, p. 273.

<sup>61</sup> Essay on 'Tragedy' in *Essays and Studies*, VIII (1922).

<sup>62</sup> *Shakespeare's Tragedies* (1950), p. 86.

bestiality, the events in both plays being seen by the audience "from within the protagonist's own consciousness", whereas this is not true of *Antony and Cleopatra* or *Coriolanus*; L. C. Knights (*An Approach to 'Hamlet'*, 1960) sees the tragedies as "a series of studies of the mind's engagement with the world, of the intimate and intricate relations of self and world... there is an exploration of the ways in which 'being' and 'knowing' are related"; John Lawlor (*The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare*, 1960) sees the different tragedies as dramatic presentations of the "shifting balance of real and apparent, agent and patient, accident and design, natural and supernatural", demonstrating "the inadequacy of man setting on his own. As the greatest punishment is isolation, separate existence, so the greatest good is the holding of the natural bond"; and John Holloway (*The Story of the Night*, 1961) is inclined to surpass the familiar 'historical' by a bold anthropological approach, and relates the tragedies to primitive myths and rituals — the tragic heroes being interpreted as scapegoats and ritual victims who have declined from man to beast.

There are also esoteric interpretations. Beryl Pogson, for example, thinks that behind the clash of human destinies in a Shakespearian tragedy there is a spiritual action; and the central characters are, in effect, apocalyptic visions of psychic possibilities. Man is in the making, and the completed man is both Purusha the male and Prakriti the female. Having fallen away from Bliss, man seeks to recover the lost heritage. The powers of Good and Evil fight their battles on the Kurukshetra that is his soul. Woman — mother, wife, sister, daughter — is the warrior's true *shakti*, his staff of support; and to reject the staff is to postpone the date of his deliverance. The lower life is karmic life, and the ultimate aim of life should be to escape the prison-house of Karma and to soar into the regions of the spirit.<sup>63</sup> A much simpler interpretation has been offered by Syed Mehdi Imam :

"From the perusal of Shakespeare's tragedies, three general principles of tragic drama emerge — the principle of Play (Lila), of Disillusionment (Maya) and Release (Mukti) ... In *Hamlet* is the play of the introspective intellect, disillusionment, and release. In *Macbeth* is the play of the

<sup>63</sup> *In the East My Pleasure Lies: An Esoteric Interpretation of Some Plays of Shakespeare* (1950).

Dark, its dissipation, and a transcendence. In *Lear* is the play of the dualities of gratitude and ingratitude, a disillusionment and a release. In *Othello* is the play of deception, its dissolution and a transcendence into Truth".<sup>64</sup>

Again, while many see the tragic hero's 'reversal of fortune' in relation to a flaw, an obsession, or an error, Peter Alexander stoutly insists that what tragedy projects before us is primarily a vision of human greatness, goodness, beauty, power, and not of human flaws, moral evil, ugliness, or impotence. Ultimately, the hard-worked Aristotelian concept of Katharsis must come to our rescue. Like all tragedy, Shakespearian tragedy too effects a Katharsis — a cleansing — a beyonding — a transcending — of the emotions and passions that rage in the human breast and are duly reflected in the play's action. And for this Katharsis to happen, the mind and soul and poetic wizardry of the dramatist should intervene between us and the characters involved in the tragic action of the play. The 'tragic' is something akin to a religious feeling and experience; "in tragedy", says Allardyce Nicoll, "man stands alone in the terrible presence of his god, and evil steps on to the earth from the impenetrable and incomprehensible unknown".<sup>65</sup> The tragic hero and heroine, even when they are apparently down and out, somehow achieve superiority to the event, either through a tremendous stoicism or through a faith that out-soars defeat and death. And the ethos of a society open to the intimations of tragedy would include an anxious concern for the fate of individual man: implying thereby that, although Rome is safe, it is still a scalding shame that Coriolanus has had to die; that, although the Empire is safe, it is a pity that it must demand as its price the extinction of an Antony. In a technological world like ours, poetic tragedy seems to have little chance; "the political inhumanity of our time", says George Steiner, "has demeaned and brutalised language beyond precedent. Words have been used to justify political falsehood, massive distortions of history, and the bestialities of the totalitarian state".<sup>66</sup> Our sensibilities are numbed, we are crushed by a sense of helplessness, and we are overcome by the thought that the engines of nuclear power are more real

<sup>64</sup> *Mother India*, Vol. XI, No. 5, p. 61.

<sup>65</sup> *Shakespeare* (1952), p. 102.

<sup>66</sup> *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), p. 315.

than humanity. It is the sort of climate that decrees the 'death of tragedy'. But even so, the hope returns that the poetic word and tragic poetry still somehow retain the residual power to tilt the balance of forces and ensure human survival.

Tragedy is both a form of literature, and an order of human experience. Imagination is the essence of both, for the man without imagination — without the capacity to feel, to forge similitudes and identities by leaping across all barriers — cannot face tragedy nor even recognise it; and the dramatist without this Promethean gift of the imagination, which is heat and light and life at once, cannot create poetic tragedy. The central mystery of life is that we must almost die (some of the lower species actually die) to give new life; the seed must lodge in the common earth and cease to be if it is to kindle into life. Why did Shelley declare that our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought? The thought of failure, defeat, death is the cancer of the mind: and to sing of failure, defeat, death, yet insinuate beyond them victory, fulfilment, immortality, is the true function of poetic tragedy. Tragedy is a confrontation of life, not a turning away from it; tragedy is not the experience of evil alone but rather the experience of good — the good along with the evil, the good in the evil, or the good beyond the evil. The stress is not on weakness, error, flaw or ugliness although these are there, no doubt; but rather on rightness, wholeness, beauty or puissance for these are there too, and are triumphantly there. Tragedy is not a tame acquiescence in defeat but a determination to see beyond the seeming finality of defeat and glimpse something positive or promising ahead. The crucifixion of Christ would be merely depressing but for the subsequent Resurrection. Without the happenings at Maricha's Ashram, the mating of the lovers at Kanva's Ashram would be no more than a tale of girlish folly and unscrupulous male seduction. In Tragedy, the resurrection is always implied — however dimly or remotely. Tragedy thus involves, not the acceptance of the seeming end, but the intuition of the conclusion yet to be concluded. This is the very apotheosis of poetic *dhwani*. Looked at this way, the apprehension of tragedy is akin to religious experience — it is initiation into a mystery, the deepest mystery of life and death and the life to be. One summary way of reading Shakespeare's great tragedies would thus be to see in *Hamlet* the implied

passage from death to immortality, from the fear of what may happen after death to the certainty of 'felicity' ; in *Othello*, the passage from falsehood to truth, from Iago's cunning fabrication to the truth that is Desdemona as at last revealed by Emilia's self-sacrificing devotion to her dead mistress ; in *King Lear*, from the darkness of the world of Goneril and Regan to the light that is Cordelia's love ; in *Macbeth*, from the play of evil and the resultant chaos of values to the grace of Grace and the return of order ; in *Antony and Cleopatra*, from insatiable sensuality to fulfilment in death and the deathless marriage on the *other* side and shoal of Time ; and in *Coriolanus*, from the assertion of self to the defeat of self and its transcendence in death. It is wading through poison and reaching at nectar : *amritam vishasamsrishtam*, in Valmiki's resplendent phrase.

CHAPTER XIV  
BEYOND TRAGEDY

I

DIVINE COMEDY

Ever since the chronology of Shakespeare's plays defined itself with sufficient clarity to push *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* and *Henry VIII* to the last few years of his active career as a dramatist, critics have been trying to see them — especially the first four of them — as a family group with certain distinguishing characteristics. Each gains in understanding when it is viewed in relation to the others. The recurring theme in most of the plays is royalty lost and recovered, order destroyed and restored. There is a breaking up — and ultimate re-making — of intimate family ties; 'kith and kin' are sundered, torn far apart, and are finally reunited. 'Sorrow is' — as poignantly as in the tragedies — but beyond the dark tunnel there is seen at last the clear light of a new dawn. These plays are unlike the tragedies that immediately preceded them; also unlike the 'problem plays' with their grating ambivalence; and even unlike the Romantic Comedies. The themes of the last plays have no doubt a superficial resemblance to those of some of the earlier plays: 'jealousy' figures in *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, as it does in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Othello*, though with a difference; Sebastian and Antonio in *The Tempest* are men of evil conspiring against their brothers, and thus recall Claudius and Edmund; and in Iachimo of *Cymbeline* is reincarnated Iago himself. Hermione's prolonged battle with despair is a proper theme for tragedy, and so is Marina's or Imogen's predicament when they find themselves suddenly cast away; they come very near dishonour or death and

but narrowly escape the peril. Nevertheless, these last plays have a 'happy' ending; the shortcomings of the past are made good in the present, and the future seems to open out endless vistas of possibility. The supposed dead are brought back to life, the enemies of yesterday are happily reconciled, — for pardon is the word to all and joy is offered to everybody. But there is this qualification to make: while these last plays end on a truly auspicious note, yet "all fetch happiness to shore out of shipwreck and suffering".<sup>1</sup> The past refuses to be wholly obliterated; something of the tragedy — or the incipient tragedy — mingles in our memories. On the other hand, the younger heroines of these plays — Marina, Imogen, Perdita and Miranda — bring back to our minds memories of earlier heroines like Isabella, Helena, Rosalind, Viola; and even in the rustic scenes there are similarities between *As You Like It* and *The Winter's Tale*, with about a dozen years between their composition. While thus recalling the tragedies and comedies of the earlier periods, these last plays have their own recognisable unity of theme, their own distinctive beauty and power, and they seem to take us to a realm beyond mere comedy or tragedy, to a condition of mind that is other than mere elation or despair.

Since these plays seem to be neither tragedies nor comedies properly speaking, they have been variously called as Tragi-comedies, Romances, or Reconciliation plays: 'Tragi-comedies' because the plays seem at first sight to move perilously towards tragic climaxes, but changing the direction suddenly and making briskly towards the haven of Comedy; 'Romances' because the actions, sometimes defying psychological probability, seem to be reminiscent of those in a typical 'romance' like Sidney's *Arcadia*<sup>2</sup>; and 'Reconciliation plays' because in these the

<sup>1</sup> Quiller-Couch, *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, p. 190. Recent critical literature (1900-1957) on the Last Plays has been ably surveyed by Philip Edwards in *Shakespeare Survey II* (1958). The Introductions to the *New Arden* editions of *Pericles* (F. D. Hoeniger), *Cymbeline* (J. M. Nosworthy), *The Winter's Tale* (J. H. P. Pafford) and *The Tempest* (Frank Kermode) take due note of the latest researches and speculations, and are full of fresh insights into the individual plays and the plays as a group.

<sup>2</sup> Of *Pericles* Frank Kermode writes: "The parabolic habit of romance touches it, more or less lightly, here and there. Truths, Truth itself perhaps, glint in the narrative, shiver and thrash in the net of language". (*Shakespeare: The Final Plays*, 1963, p. 19.) This is generally applicable to all the Romances.



dramatist does seem to be "occupied with forgiveness, reconciliation, the adjustment, under Heaven, of goodwill among men", this reconciliation coming about "through the young and for the young".<sup>3</sup> The sins of the fathers are not to be visited on the children; rather are these children — long lost and miraculously preserved and restored — destined to be the means of the redemption of the fathers.

Why was it that Shakespeare effected this apparently determined shift in his dramatic workmanship? Might it not be that Shakespeare began some of these plays as tragedies, then left them aside, and later — the tragic mood having passed in the meantime — completed them as comedies? But this hypothesis doesn't seem to fit *The Tempest*, perhaps not even *Cymbeline*. The view, originally advanced by Ashley Thorndike, that in writing *Cymbeline* Shakespeare was influenced by Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* is not held seriously any more. It is true there are similarities — loose episodes, melodramatic scenes, artificial theatrical effects, a free and easy flow of sweetness in the verse, and parallel characters (Arethusa=Imogen, Bellario=Fidele, Philaster=Posthumus, Pharamond=Cloten) — between the two plays, but since the chronology of the plays is uncertain<sup>4</sup>, the theory will have to be abandoned. Indeed, Miss M. C. Bradbrook (like some others) hazards the opinion that "on internal probability, it seems . . . likeliest that Shakespeare led the way for Beaumont and Fletcher, and that his play preceded theirs".<sup>5</sup>

Dowden's view (generally shared by his contemporaries, Israel Gollancz, Ten Brink and George Brandes) was that Shakespeare's last plays represent a distinct phase in his mental and spiritual development, revealing the sobriety, sanity and serenity of old age as contrasted with the storm and stress and sombre significances of the 'tragic period'. Dowden's actual words may be profitably quoted here:

"... at the end there is a resolution of dissonance, a reconciliation. This is the word which interprets Shakespeare's latest plays — reconciliation, 'word over all, beautiful as the sky' ... not a mere stage necessity, or a necessity of composition, resorted to by the dramatist to effect an

<sup>3</sup> Quiller-Couch, *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, pp. 184, 190.

<sup>4</sup> It cannot be proved, says E. K. Chambers, that *Cymbeline* was produced after 1610 or that *Philaster* was produced before 1610.

<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry* (1951), p. 202.

ending of his play, and little interesting his imagination or his heart. Its significance here is ethical and spiritual; it is a moral necessity . . ."<sup>6</sup>

And again: "over the beauty of youth and the love of youth, there is shed, in these plays of Shakspeare's final period, a clear yet tender luminousness, not elsewhere to be perceived in his writings".<sup>7</sup> But Strachey, in his celebrated essay (1904), argued against any such 'inner' change, and offered his own hypothesis of the bored and disillusioned Shakespeare opting for metrical and artistic freedom, losing himself in rhetoric, fancy, and unreality, but also giving vent to sudden unpredictable spasms of violence:

"Is it not thus, then, that we should imagine him in the last years of his life? Half enchanted by visions of beauty and loveliness, and half bored to death; on the one side inspired by a soaring fancy to the singing of ethereal songs, and on the other urged by a general disgust to burst occasionally through his torpor into bitter and violent speech?"<sup>8</sup>

Totally disagreeing with Strachey, Tillyard declares that "there is no lack of vitality, Shakespeare is not bored with things", and adds by way of explanation: "my conviction of this springs from the rhythms, the imagery, in fact from those most intimate poetical qualities about which it is futile to argue".<sup>9</sup> Strachey was necessary as an antidote to the somewhat sentimental picture of a Shakespeare "forgiven and forgiving, full of the highest wisdom and peace", a Shakespeare 'on the Heights', a Shakespeare more God than man; but Strachey certainly erred in completely denying the developing vision behind the last plays and its relation to the spiritual change in Shakespeare himself. Wilson Knight has since tried to interpret the last plays as 'myths of immortality' and as 'parables' insinuating profound truths:

"... the Final Plays of Shakespeare, concerned on the whole less with a purely moral issue, and except in *Cymbeline* steering clear of definite theology, display plots whose texture is soaked in the quality of romantic immortality. For in Shakespeare, as at the conclusion of Goethe's *Faust*, we are insistently aware of the quality of romantic love as in some way intrinsically connected with the immortality of the human spirit: so, too, Beatrice, not Vergil, guides Dante through the spheres of Heaven".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Shakspeare: His Mind and Art*, pp. 406-7.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>8</sup> *Literary Essays*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> *Shakespeare's Last Plays* (1938), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *The Crown of Life* (1958), p. 30.

Wilson Knight thus interprets the last plays, viewing them as an integrated whole, as poetic vision and revelation, justifying their being classed with *The Book of Job*, *The Divine Comedy*, and Goethe's *Faust*.

In recent years the plays of the 'last period' have been receiving increasing attention and much guess-work, theorising and interpretative ingenuity have been expended on them. Perhaps there was more than one reason for the change in the climate and workmanship of the last plays. Fashions are apt to change, and when Middleton and Dekker said in 1610 —

Tragic passion

And such grave stuff is this day out of fashion<sup>11</sup> —

they were but recording a contemporary fact however brought about. The influence of the Masques at the Court of King James I was doubtless another factor. A third was, as suggested by Gerald Bentley<sup>12</sup>, the rise of compact indoor theatres like the Blackfriars which made special stage-effects possible. But external causes like fashions in the theatre and the Court or the exigencies of the closed theatre could not by themselves explain Shakespeare's last plays, their curious cast and their unique appeal. Weren't there more intimate, more urgent, causes as well? Did Shakespeare undergo a religious conversion about 1608, probably as the result of an illness? The clergyman, Richard Davies, said at the end of the 17th century that Shakespeare had "died a papist". Was he educated in early life, not at the Grammar School at Stratford, but privately at the house of a Catholic nobleman, and, after periods of agonising uncertainty, did he return to the 'fold' at last? But these are mere speculations. Although E. K. Chambers doesn't commit himself to any such firm conclusions, he nevertheless thinks that Shakespeare must have undergone some sort of spiritual crisis about 1607-8 — "which in the psychology of religion bears the name of conversion; or perhaps some sickness of the brain which left him an old man, freed at last from the fever of speculation and well disposed to spend the afternoon of life in unexacting and agreeable dreams".<sup>13</sup> Whether there was an illness or not, the

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *The Essential Shakespeare*, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 'Shakespeare and the Blackfriars Theatre' (*Shakespeare Survey* 1, 1948, pp. 38ff).

<sup>13</sup> *Shakespeare: A Survey*, p. 293.

'change' is obvious enough; and this 'change', again, may be viewed, less as a revolution, and more as a natural evolution. Una Ellis-Fermor has remarked that Tragedy is but "an interim reading of life"<sup>14</sup>. Yet this 'interim' reading is meant to hint at the ultimate unfoldment of the mystery. In the last plays, however, the hint is made whole and is seen as fulfilment. Tragedy, in short, becomes Divine Comedy. As M. D. H. Parker says, "'To hold the mirror up to nature' was Hamlet's dramatic recipe, and, he might have added had he lived to the later plays 'to grace'".<sup>15</sup> There is the reference to the 'grace of Grace' near the end of *Macbeth*: now, in the last plays, Grace becomes an active participant in human affairs. The preservation of Marina, Imogen, Perdita and Miranda from imminent death — their deliverance from death or dishonour to new life and joy — the twilight glory of reconciliation following the fury and frenzy of the severances and feuds — the triumph of innocence over its enemies, of Good over Evil — exemplify the operation of the 'grace of Grace' more than of mere human ingenuity and contrivance. When 'nature' is sought to be perverted by contrivance, the order of Grace alone can set things right. The Romances are really the Tragedies, but so extended as to comprehend, not only Inferno and Purgatory, but also Paradise; not only the spectacle of man's heroic resistance to adverse circumstances but also a transcendence, a mastering and a beyonding of the evil. John F. Danby, in the course of his illuminating study of *King Lear*, makes an important point:

"The last plays seem to belong to the mood of Lear's convalescence. Shakespeare weaves his stories round a theme other than 'Killing the King'. In these stories Lear and Cordelia find each other again and live happily ever after".<sup>16</sup>

While Lear and Cordelia find each other again on the *other* bank of the river of Time, in the Romances the reunion is permanently effected here and now. In the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, the concluding play (the *Eumenides*) effects the reconciliation and inaugurates the new order. In a Shakespearian tragedy like *Antony and Cleopatra* or *Coriolanus*, on the other hand, we have

<sup>14</sup> *The Frontiers of Drama*, p. 147.

<sup>15</sup> *The Slave of Life*, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (1962 Paperback), p. 195.

only a glimpse of the *Eumenides*, though the feeling of reconciliation is rather stronger in *Coriolanus* than in its predecessor ; and Bradley rightly concludes that this last of the tragedies "marks the transition to the latest works, in which the powers of repentance and forgiveness charm to rest the tempest raised by error and guilt".<sup>17</sup>

In his last plays, Shakespeare seems to ask himself whether crime or injury, instead of being followed by punishment or retaliation, cannot be followed by repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. 'Resist not evil !' was Jesus' unambiguous exhortation. If the enemy deals a blow on the left cheek, show him the right cheek as well ! But such patient sufferance of evil is vocation for a saint—for example, the saintly King in *3 Henry VI* who is prepared to pardon even his murderer, Richard. Isabella too, schooled in the Christian ethic during her noviciate, is willing to plead for Angelo's life, though her first reaction is to pluck out his eyes. Absolute love also—as in *Desdemona*—can forget the injury and forgive the person who has just insulted and injured beyond repair. But Shakespeare felt, as we all feel, that for average humanity forgiving at the very moment of the injury is impossible, being a counsel of perfection to a wretchedly imperfect world. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, is the more likely—the more normal—reaction. But suppose there intervenes a passage of time before the intention to retaliate has been able to mature into an act, what then ? When two people are exchanging blows, our first impulse is to separate them ; we naturally hope that the mere separation will have a sobering effect. Likewise, if the injurer and the injured could be kept apart for some months or years, is it not probable that they might find it possible to view things in a less aggressive light ? Time is the infallible healer of all wounds, but it is essential that we should give Time a chance. In Kalidasa's *Abijnana Sakuntalam*, Dushyanta rejects the wife whom he had wedded at Kanva's hermitage ; then there is an interval of some years ; when they meet again, now at Maricha's hermitage, she is in a mood to forgive him and he is in a fit frame of mind to receive this grace of forgiveness. The pattern here is : crime (or injury, if we wish to be euphemistical) — an interval which facilitates repentance on the part of the injurer and re-thinking on the

<sup>17</sup> *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 84.

part of the injured — and eventual disseverance and reconciliation. This is roughly the pattern followed in Shakespeare's last plays as well. Cymbeline has injured Belarius, and Belarius has injured Cymbeline; Leontes has injured Hermione and all but killed her; Alonso has injured Prospero and Miranda. But there is a time-gap between the causing of the injury and the next meeting. Circumstances have changed in the meantime, the mind is receptive to the invasion of grace, and so forgiveness, reunion, and reconstruction follow as a natural course. Tragedy, having received the impact of the grace of Grace, remoulds itself into Divine Comedy.

This close connection between the Tragedies and the Romances has been noticed, and indeed emphasised, by more than one critic. Tillyard thinks that the Romances only "develop the final phase of the tragic pattern, to add, as it were, the *Eumenides* to the already completed *Agamemnon* and *Choephores*, a process repeated by Milton when he supplemented *Paradise Lost* with *Samson Agonistes*".<sup>18</sup> The spectacle of Prosperity followed by Destruction is capped by the phenomenon of re-creation. John Vyvyan also finds in these plays a pattern of regeneration: whereas in the Tragedies the hero succumbs to temptation and is destroyed, in these (and other) plays of regeneration he triumphs over the tempter, experiences enlightenment, and achieves a symbolic union of love — *Hamlet* is thus contrasted with *Measure for Measure*, *Othello* with *The Winter's Tale*, and *Macbeth* with *The Tempest*.<sup>19</sup> Traversi thinks that in the plotting of the last plays "the harmonising theme first attempted in *King Lear*, and there broken by the prevailing tragic emotion, produces a symbolic conception of drama completely removed from realism and scarcely paralleled in English literature".<sup>20</sup> And G. I. Duthie reads the plays as a demonstration of the dynamics of disorder giving way to order at last, breakdown being followed by reconstruction.

Certainly, it is rewarding to forge the links between the Tragedies and the Romances, and to see them all as a significant panoramic sequence of plays with a developing vision and art. While the dating of *Cymbeline* (or of *Philaster*) may raise diffi-

<sup>18</sup> *Shakespeare's Last Plays*, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> *The Shakespearean Ethic*, p. 184.

<sup>20</sup> *The Age of Shakespeare* (Ed. by Boris Ford), 1955, p. 257.

culties, *Pericles* clearly preceded them both, having been entered on the Stationers' Register in 1608 and published next year (Q<sub>1</sub>). Between *Pericles* and its successors there are more affinities in plot, characterisation, symbolism and atmosphere than between *Cymbeline* and *Philaster*. From *Coriolanus* to *Pericles* the shift is from the heroic world of Plutarch to the Sidnean world of *Arcadia*. Here is tragedy in terms of blinding brinkmanship, but total irremediable ruin is luckily averted. There is a double-change : from day to night, and again from night to a new dawn. The violence of discord leads to *adversity* : there is a sullen calm, and the need for *patience* : and *Time* weaves in its loom the fabric of a new happiness, and the strains of incantatory music with power to chasten and renew suddenly fill the air. When intemperance and impatience give a vicious twist to human affairs, 'evil' quickly gains the upper hand and 'good' is for the nonce forced into the defensive. In the *Ramayana*, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, and in the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi and the Pandavas, are all exiled to the forest. But the temporary exile of these good men and women appears in retrospect to have been no more than a necessary strategic retreat, for the instrumentality of *Kāla* (Time) sets things right in due course. Not the mere passage of time, however ; for some form of divine intervention — some ineluctable play of Grace — is also implied. The protagonist, Grace, uses Time as a flute, and plays on it efficacious melodies anew. There's a Divinity that shapes our ends, — a special Providence that now raises the storm, and now brings the airs from heaven. Greene's *Pandosto*, on which Shakespeare based *The Winter's Tale*, has for its sub-title 'The Triumph of Time'. In all the four Romances, 'time' has indeed a role to play, but rather as the necessary background, the bass, the *sruti*. When man is unwary and yields too readily to intemperance or impatience, Time only breeds corruption and precipitates disaster ; but when man arms himself with humility and patience, Time becomes his ally and helps to engineer the return of health and happiness. Taking a large view, John F. Danby writes :

"The moral scheme behind the whole of Shakespeare's work is more inclusive and more integrated than we have been apt to suppose . . . *King Lear* in fact can be regarded as a study in patience unrewarded although achieved, *Timon* and the Roman plays as studies in impatience, and the plays of the last period as studies in patience rewarded".<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Poets on Fortune's Hill* (1952), pp. 105-6.

If Time is the bass or *sruti*, the mystical leap from night to dawn, from death to rebirth, is the sanction of Grace which takes the form of music. Writing of 'Music and Its Function in the Romances of Shakespeare', J. M. Nosworthy makes this perceptive comment :

"Each of the romances is an advance upon its immediate predecessor, philosophically as well as technically, and music comes to occupy a conspicuous and effective position in the moral and metaphysical fabric. These plays are basically a mirror of Creation in human terms, with love shaping a new world out of chaos to the sound of music and the motions of the dance, and this pattern is most fully achieved in *The Tempest* . . . Music is there, in the last analysis, to direct thought and action 'beyond beyond' to a 'brave new world' in which the Golden Age is restored".<sup>22</sup>

It is 'Paradise Lost' followed by 'Paradise Regained'; the *thandav* dance of furious destruction followed by the calm of exhaustion and the joy of new love and life's renewal. The integration of mythic-realistic, magical-musical, pagan-christian, romantic-ethical elements is brought about — to beg the question! — by a 'final' spurt of creative energy that fuses vision, story, character, poetry and music into almost a new species of dramatic art.

In the attempt to 'place' the quartet of Romances and to grasp their total significance, critics have found it fruitful to compare Shakespeare's 'last period' with the 'last periods' of other great artists — Racine, Milton, Wordsworth, Beethoven, Rembrandt, Ibsen, Dostoevsky, Yeats, and (I may add) O'Neill and Mauriac — and also to draw inspiration from the idea and symbol and structure of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Dover Wilson sees points of affinity between *The Tempest* and *The Brothers Karamazov*; Peter Alexander between Shakespeare's last plays and Beethoven's final quartets and Rembrandt's last pictures; Kenneth Muir finds in the last plays of Shakespeare, Racine and Ibsen the same coming to terms with the universe through the wisdom gained by experience and "the full realisation of human evil and suffering"; Frank Kermode finds the last plays "baffling in design and often in texture", reminding us of the "works of other 'last periods', of Beethoven's, or perhaps of Yeats's — the 'little mechanical songs' and the noisy ballads coexisting with

<sup>22</sup> *Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies presented to F. P. Wilson*, p. 68.



the obscure grandeur of, say, 'The Statues' ".<sup>23</sup> There is a definite 'arriving' in Shakespeare's last plays, in contrast with the agonised journeyings, thwarted purposings, and abortive strivings of the Tragedies,—an advance paralleled to some extent in O'Neill's *A Moon for the Misbegotten* or Mauriac's *The Lamb*. In O'Neill's play the stress is on the need for love and the efficacy of love. In Mauriac's novel, the young hero wears the crown of thorns, bears the cross, and enacts the crucifixion — so that those whom he loves may live and love. This gives a religious dimension to the novel without damaging its high artistic integrity. Likewise Shakespeare's last plays also have been described as "these moral, almost religious, visions".<sup>24</sup> Tragedy too is quintessentially a religious experience, instinct with awe and a brooding mystery and a clinging residual hope ; but in these last plays there is, beyond the Dark Night of the Soul, the radiance of dawn, — the vision of Ahana the Dawn of God incarnated in immaculate girlhood like Marina, Imogen, Perdita, Miranda. From the tragic vision of merely implied Resurrection to the vision in the Romances of a feasible 'Earthly Paradise' there is a decided shift, almost a change of planes, and dramatic poetry, besides projecting reality at its intensest moments, acquires also the accents of prophecy. This shift in moral and metaphysical terms is thus explained by M. D. H. Parker :

"... evil in Shakespeare, as in St. Augustine and St. Thomas, is the defection of being and Nature. It is caused typically and essentially by pride and the lust for power. Suffering is due to sin, but not necessarily to the sin of the person concerned. By suffering, their own or another's, men may become good. But in time — and this constitutes Shakespearian tragedy — this good, though real, is mortal ... Shakespeare's last plays close the metaphysic of the tragedies and the ethic of the comedies in an increasing integration of eternity and time".<sup>25</sup>

But this 'integration' is more than mere myth or symbol, idea or hypothesis, platitude or formula ; it takes the credible shape of a young woman, who is central to the dramatic as well as the spiritual action, being symbol and woman in one. If the earlier Romantic Comedy could be identified with a Portia, a Beatrice,

<sup>23</sup> Dover Wilson, *The Essential Shakespeare*, pp. 134ff ; Alexander, *A Shakespeare Primer*, pp. 121ff ; Muir, *Last Periods of Shakespeare, Racine and Ibsen* (1961) ; and Kermode, *Shakespeare: The Final Plays*, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup> Donald A. Stauffer, *Shakespeare's World of Images*, p. 297.

<sup>25</sup> *The Slave of Life*, p. 175.

a Rosalind, a Viola, Divine Comedy could equally be identified with a Marina, an Imogen, a Perdita, a Miranda. There may be other powers, other thrones, other beneficent spheres; but the young heroine is the Beatrice of this Divine Comedy, she is Nature perfected by nurture, and youth and beauty augmented by divine compassion and love. As pointed out already, there is an order of Nature, and set alongside of it there is an order of human contrivance, and poised above it an order of Grace. Often human contrivance, in the very attempt to improve upon the order of Nature, perverts and destroys it. The order of Grace, which operates by itself or in response to the cry of the anguished human soul, is the order that brings the heavens down to mingle in our earth-ways. In these last plays the order of Grace imposes at last its beneficent will on the order of mere human ingenuity and contrivance. Thus physical action shades off into the symbolic, the dramatic action into the spiritual which includes and transcends it. And when in the full plenitude of this prophetic vision fathers and children, husbands and wives, forge a new community of hearts, a new marriage of minds in a new heaven and a new earth, then indeed Goethe's description of Kalidasa's 'divine comedy' becomes applicable to all these divine comedies of Shakespeare's last period as well:

Would'st thou the young year's blossoms and the fruits of its decline,  
And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed,  
Would'st thou the Earth and Heaven itself in one sole name combine?  
I name thee, O Sakuntala, and all at once is said.

The web of these divine comedies is so complex and variegated that they seem to comprise all earth, hell and heaven, gathering to a rounded fullness of articulation the insights and inspirations of a whole life-time. It is a fitting apotheosis to the career of this great dramatist and poet.

## II

### *PERICLES, PRINCE OF TYRE*

*Pericles* was printed as a Quarto, with Shakespeare's name on the title-page, in 1609, having been entered on the Stationers' Register on 20 May 1608. It was a Bad Quarto, though it gave

a comparatively good text. Three more issues followed before the Folio of 1623, but Heminge and Condell excluded it from their edition. *Pericles* didn't find a place either in  $F_2$  or  $F_3$ , but in the second issue of  $F_3$  (1664), the play was included along with six other plays. Of these seven, only *Pericles* has now been generally accepted as Shakespeare's and included in collected editions of the Plays and Poems. In Shakespeare's time and afterwards, *Pericles* was evidently a popular play. The first Quarto described it as "the late and much admired play". The story figured in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (Book VIII), as also in Laurence Twine's *The Patterne of Painfull Adventures* which was reprinted in 1607, though the first edition might have appeared 30 years earlier. There was also a novel by George Wilkins on the same subject (1608), which claimed to be the story of the play acted by the King's Men; the names Apollonius, Lucina and Tharsia now become *Pericles*, *Thaisa* and *Marina* respectively. We have thus Gower and Twine, the ultimate sources, to which may perhaps be added Sidney's *Arcadia* and Plautus' *Rudens* (the former supplying the name *Pyrocles*=*Pericles*, the latter certain verbal felicities<sup>26</sup>); and there is also Wilkins's novel, and the play on which it was based. Was this play the same as Shakespeare's *Pericles*, or was it only an *Ur-Pericles*, the immediate source of both Wilkins's novel and Shakespeare's play? If there was an *Ur-Pericles*, was it also by Shakespeare—or by Wilkins—or by somebody else (Heywood perhaps)? Reading *Pericles* as it has come down to us, we feel that the first 2 Acts are inferior to Acts III-V. How are we to account for this? One possibility is that *Ur-Pericles* was wholly by Shakespeare, and the 1609 Quarto's imperfection is due to the fact that 2 reporters were responsible for it, a bad reporter for Acts I-II and a good reporter for Acts III-V. But if the play was wholly Shakespearian, why did Heminge and Condell exclude it from the First Folio? Perhaps Shakespeare was responsible only for Acts III-V (that is, the *Marina* story), and another hand supplied the first two Acts. Or, perhaps, there was a wholly non-Shakespearian *Ur-Pericles* by Heywood and Wilkins (or by an unknown dramatist), the last 3 Acts of which alone received revision in 1608 at Shakespeare's hands. While it is difficult to see our way clearly through the jungle of the controversy on the

<sup>26</sup> Percy Simpson, *Studies in Elizabethan Drama* (1955), pp. 13ff.

subject, it is also obvious that *Pericles* as we have it is sufficiently Shakespearian to be treated seriously as part of the Canon.<sup>27</sup>

The story of *Pericles* covers a life-time: the scene is "dispersedly in various countries": the hero, like Ulysses, is a much-travelled and long-suffering man. We move from place to place — from Antioch to Tyre, from Tyre to Tharsus, from Tharsus to Pentapolis, from Pentapolis to Ephesus, — back to Tyre and to Tharsus for a while, — then on to Mytilene and from there to the Temple of Diana at Ephesus (with further journeys ahead). We alternate between palace and ship, land and sea, calm and storm, hope and despair; we gallop across space as swiftly as we skip long periods of time. All this shows, as Quiller-Couch points out, that this play was intended by Shakespeare (if *he* was responsible for it in its entirety) as "a new thing, or an attempt at a new thing; an attempt, by boldly casting over all unity of time, to present in terms of drama what naturally belongs to epic or romance".<sup>28</sup> Loosely episodic though the action is, there are strong connecting links like Gower's choral speeches, which recall a similar contrivance in *Henry V.* *Pericles'* journeyings — "more extensive than those of any other Shakespearian hero", according to J. C. Maxwell — are apparently meant to present life itself as a journey and a struggle, fusing the Senecan idea of viewing life as a journey with its vicissitudes, oases in the desert, unexpected meetings, and zig-zag progression towards the goal, with the idea (associated with Prudentius' *Clemens'* Latin poem, *Psychomachia*) of viewing life as a battle, waged without and within. While *Pericles'* journeys are far-flung and are full of ups and downs, Marina's forced sojourn in the Brothel assumes the dramatic intensity of a descent into Hell, a struggle with the Dragon, and a victorious emergence from the trial. Father and daughter (with the mother in the background) become the protagonists in the drama of the human soul played on the ambigu-

<sup>27</sup> See K. Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, Vol. I, pp. 225ff; J. C. Maxwell, Introduction to the *New Shakespeare* edition (1956), pp. xliif; Philip Edwards, *Shakespeare Survey* 5 (1952), pp. 25ff; and G. Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>28</sup> *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, p. 194. F. D. Hoeniger has tried to show that the structure of *Pericles* closely parallels that of certain miracle or saint's plays — like *Mary Magdalene*, for example. Extraordinary adventures and turns of fortune figure in both plays. As Marina 'converts' Lysimachus, Mary 'converts' the King of Marcyll or Marseilles. (*The New Arden* edition, 1963, pp. lxxxviii, xc).

ous theatre of this too too sullied earth. Owing to the circumstances of the writing of the play or of the transmission of the 'text', the vision that inspired and sustained the composition is now somewhat blurred, but there can be no doubt that Shakespeare was "at a new thing", at something that was meant to take us a little beyond the insights and visions of *King Lear* (the highest point of the tragic period). There is an obvious similarity between the recognition scene in *King Lear* (IV. vii) and the one in *Pericles* (V. i.).<sup>29</sup> Both the scenes are built to music, but whereas it is background music in *King Lear*, in the later play Marina herself sings to Pericles to awaken his stupefied soul. Again, in *Lear* it is but the father recognising the daughter at the moment of recovery from his madness; in *Pericles*, it is a two-way recognition as in *The Winter's Tale*, but more poignant than in the latter (where it is only reported) because Pericles has first to be enabled to come out of the darkness of his mind's oblivion before he can behold the light. By making the recognition scene the chief glory of the play, the central point of its vision, and moving from it (not, as in *Lear*, to the death of both daughter and father: an eclipse so soon quite overwhelming the new Dawn: but moving to the Temple of Diana at Ephesus and effecting the union of father, mother and daughter) Shakespeare was surely after big things, and the whole play — not only its plotting but also its characterisation and poetry — should have led up to those Pisgah heights. But the play is like a mutilated cheque, the amount no doubt clearly indicated, the signature (although truncated) unmistakable, and yet not easily cashable on account of the mutilation.

In I. i, Pericles seeks the hand of the unnamed daughter of Antiochus the Great of Antioch in Syria. Asked to read the riddle —

I am no viper, yet I feed  
On mother's flesh which did me breed.  
I sought a husband, in which labour  
I found that kindness in a father . . . —

Pericles discovers to his horror the incestuous relationship between the two. Escaping from Antioch to his own Tyre, he realises that Antiochus is sure to pursue him with vengeance for

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 201-2 for a comparison of the two scenes.

having dared to stumble upon the truth. Leaving Tyre to be governed by Helicanus, Pericles puts out to the sea and reaches Tharsus in time to save its inhabitants from imminent starvation, and so wins the gratitude of Clcon the Governor and his wife Dionyza. Presently leaving Tharsus (being still in danger of pursuit by Antiochus' agents), Pericles' ship is wrecked near Pentapolis. One of the fishermen says (II. i. 20) —

Alas, poor souls ! It grieved my heart to hear what pitiful cries they made to us to help them, when, well-a-day, we could scarce help ourselves —

anticipating the Clown's words to his father in *The Winter's Tale* ("O, the most piteous cry of the poor souls ! . . ." : III. iii. 87) and Miranda's to her father in *The Tempest* ("O, the cry did knock/Against my very heart ! Poor souls, they perish'd" : I. i. 8). As the fishermen draw up a net, they find in it Pericles' armour and allow him to have it. In II. i, Pericles appears along with other Knights before King Simonides to claim the hand of his daughter, Thaisa. Uncertain moves and ambiguous posturings follow. Simonides tells the Knights that Thaisa will wear "Diana's livery" for a year (II. v. 10), but before the scene ends he agrees to her immediate marriage with Pericles. Does it mean that, having taken an oath, Thaisa lightheartedly breaks it — Pericles being a party to this impious act ? Is it possible, then, as Kenneth Muir suggests, that "Shakespeare intended us to think that Thaisa's misfortunes were caused by the wrath of the goddess" ?<sup>30</sup>

Gower's speech at the beginning of Act III is interspersed with a Dumb Show : on the receipt of a letter importing the death of Antiochus and his daughter, Pericles departs for Tyre with Thaisa, and her nurse Lychordia. In III. i. we see (as at the beginning of *The Tempest*) a shipwreck in progress, Pericles apostrophising the sea from a ship-board (III. i. 1) :

Thou god of this great vast, rebuke these surges,  
Which wash both heaven and hell ; and thou that hast  
Upon the winds command, bind them in brass,  
Having call'd them from the deep ! O, still  
The deaf'ning dreadful thunders ; gently quench  
Thy nimble sulphurous flashes ! — O, how, Lychordia,

<sup>30</sup> *Shakespeare's Sources*, Vol. I, p. 227

How does my queen ? — Thou stormest venomously ;  
 Wilt thou spit all thyself ? The seaman's whistle  
 Is as a whisper in the ears of death,  
 Unheard. — Lychordia ! — Lucina, O  
 Divinest patroness, and midwife gentle  
 To those that cry by night, convey thy deity  
 Aboard our dancing boat ; make swift the pangs  
 Of my queen's travails !

This of course is authentic Shakespcare. Pericles' general anxiety — his particular anxiety for his wife — his calling the nurse — his despairing appeal to Lucina (the goddess Diana), all come out in the speech which translates his disturbed emotions into vivid dramatic poetry. Lychordia now brings a just-born infant and informs him that Thaisa has died in child-birth, provoking Pericles' lament (III. i. 22) :

O you gods !  
 Why do you make us love your goodly gifts,  
 And snatch them straight away ? ...  
 Now, mild may be thy life ! ...  
 Thou hast as chiding a nativity  
 As fire, air, water, earth, and heaven, can make,  
 To herald thee from the womb ...

Thaisa herself has to be thrown overboard in a chest ; but, not being actually dead, when the chest is washed ashore near Ephesus and taken to the physician Cerimon (a first sketch of Prospero), he restores her to life with the aid of music and medication. When she learns what has happened, she decides to take " a vestal livery ... / And never more have joy " (III. iv. 10). Meantime Pericles takes Marina (for so he decides to name his daughter) to Tharsus and leaves her in the care of Cleon and Dionyza.

There is about the same interval between Acts III and IV as there is in *The Winter's Tale*. Marina has grown to glorious girlhood, and has provoked the venomous envy of Dionyza whose own daughter Philoten is outshone in every way by Marina ; and so Dionyza orders her servant (Leonine) to kill Marina. As she first makes her appearance with a basket of flowers, Marina clearly pre-figures Perdita the queen of flowers (and curds and cream). Left alone with Leonine, she starts a conversation rich in undertones (IV. i. 52) :

*Marina.* Is this wind westerly that blows ?  
*Leonine.* South-west.  
*Marina.* When I was born the wind was north.  
*Leonine.* Was't so ?  
*Marina.* My father, as nurse says, did never fear,  
 But cried 'Good seamen !' to the sailors, galling  
 His kingly hands hauling ropes ;  
 And, clasping to the mast, endur'd a sea  
 That almost burst the deck.

Presently Leonine says "Come, say your prayers". Marina feels sharply pulled up, and pleads for her life much as Prince Arthur does in *King John*. But Leonine is forestalled by some pirates who seize Marina, carry her away, and sell her to a brothel in Mytilene. On Leonine falsely informing Dionyza that the deed has been done, she conveys the news to Cleon, and when he grumbles a little she charges him with cowardice (IV. iii. 25). With cool practicality (worthy of a Lady Macbeth or Regan), Dionyza assures Cleon (IV. iii. 40) :

As for Pericles,  
 What should he say ? We wept after her hearse,  
 And yet we mourn ; her monument  
 Is almost finish'd, and her epitaphs  
 In glittering golden characters express  
 A general praise to her, and care in us  
 At whose expense 'tis done.

In IV. iv (partly dumb-show) we see Pericles coming to Tharsus, making lamentation before Marina's supposed tomb, and departing in a passion ; he will not wash, or shave ; he bears

A tempest which his mortal vessel tears.  
 And yet he rides it out.

To turn to Marina, she causes a revolution in the brothel at Mytilene. She preaches divinity, sends away gallants and rakes converted to a virtuous life, and speaks 'holy words' to the Lord Lysimachus himself. Her final victory is to convert the pandar's servant, Boulton, and persuade him to help her to secure some honest occupation. Although some critics have questioned the Shakespearian authorship of these brothel scenes, their vigorous realism has been applauded by others ; and Raleigh has remarked that these scenes (like *Measure for Measure*) "prove Shakes-



peare's acquaintance with the darker side of the town, as it might be seen in Picket-hatch or the Bankside", and adds: "He does not fear to expose the purest of his heroines to the breath of this infection; their virtue is not ignorance".<sup>31</sup> The fairy-tale transformation brought about by Marina needs all this realism as ballast to sustain the reader's attention and belief. Marina's descent into this hell and emergence from it invest her with a mythical potency, making her almost semi-divine, a Beatrice of these triple worlds of defeat, revival and victory. In V. i, Pericles — inert and speechless and unkempt — is revealed on a couch on board a ship lying off Mytilene; Lysimachus thinks that perhaps Marina can do something. She is brought in — she sings — and even her speech is like music. Pericles starts speaking, memory revives in him, and he says half incredulous (V. i. 105):

I am great with woe, and shall deliver weeping.  
My dearest wife was like this maid, and such a one  
My daughter might have been . . .

It was, perhaps, this passage that proved the inspiration behind T. S. Eliot's *Marina* with its haunting concluding lines:

This form, this face, this life  
Living to live in a world of time beyond me: let me  
Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,  
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.  
What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers  
And woodthrush calling through the fog  
My daughter.

They recognise each other, and more music from her sends him asleep. Diana appears to him in a vision and directs him to her temple at Ephesus. In V. iii, Pericles sees in the priestess of the temple his own Thaisa, and Marina kneels to her mother. The reunion is complete, and Marina is to marry Lysimachus. And Gower, in his last chorus, informs us that, not only Antiochus and his daughter, but Cleon and Dionyza also, are dead — meeting the just punishment for their evil acts of commission or omission. In Wilson Knight's words,

"Nothing is here forgotten: Antiochus' wickedness, Pericles' relief of the famine, the crime of Dionyza and Cleon, all are exactly remembered

<sup>31</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 53.

... from first to last the Gower speeches have the whole action in mind; the various imagistic correspondences, cutting across divergences of style, knit the narrative into a unity. Every line, good or bad, serves a purpose ... the whole, as we have it, is unquestionably dominated by a single mind; that mind is very clearly Shakespeare's; and Shakespeare's, too, in process of an advance unique in literature".<sup>32</sup>

The articulation no doubt falters in the earlier part of the play, but Shakespeare does seem to direct his art towards a specific goal. The journeyings and sufferings of *Pericles* symbolise human vicissitudes that have to be confronted with patience and faith. The wages of evil — whether in Antioch or in Tharsus — is but death. Cerimon's is the higher knowledge, and his actions are governed by humanity and charity. But tempest-born Marina — like 'nectar' in Indian mythology coming out of the churned ocean — is 'absolute Marina'; she is the grace of Grace, she is the symbol of the Resurrection greater than the life that is dead.

### III

#### CYMBELINE<sup>33</sup>

Discussing the 'structure' of the last plays, Clifford Leech says that whereas "the experience of time makes us aware of both cycle and crisis", in *Pericles* we have more of the "sense of a life-cycle" while in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* "there is manifestly an attempt to fuse the notions of cycle and crisis, but the impress of *Pericles* is in some measure on each of its successors".<sup>34</sup> In *Pericles* we have the feeling that the three principal characters are playthings of chance who are ultimately redeemed by a benevolent Providence; but Marina at least imposes on *Pericles* the quality of 'crisis', though this happens only towards the end of the play. The recognition scenes have no doubt their own poignancy and beauty, but the recognition and reunion call for no repentance or forgiveness: the creatures of

<sup>32</sup> *The Crown of Life*, p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> This section incorporates portions of an article contributed by me to the *Visvabharati Quarterly*, January 1947, pp. 213-27.

<sup>34</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 11 (1958), pp. 19ff.

evil are safely dead, the good people inherit the earth. Unless of course we say that Thaisa, by forswearing herself about taking Diana's livery, provoked the shipwreck and all that followed; and so she had to expiate her sin by becoming in fact a priestess at Ephesus for several years. In *Cymbeline* and its two successors, the 'guilt' is more explicit, and is followed by suffering, repentance and forgiveness. For example, while the career of Imogen in *Cymbeline* may correspond to the blameless Pericles' or Marina's, Posthumus is certainly guilty, and Cymbeline and Belarius are guilty too: this guilt weaves the pattern of suffering, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation in the play — a pattern more fully worked out in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. *Cymbeline* thus marks the transition from *Pericles* to the two final Romances.

On the other hand, *Cymbeline* may be said to be dominated by Imogen quite as much as *Hamlet* is by the Prince of Denmark or *Coriolanus* by its hero. The 'history' part — Cymbeline and his two sons, the demand for tribute by Rome, and the ensuing war and peace — is but the framework, for which Shakespeare went to Holinshed's *History of England* (Book III); a few names and allusions, and the incident of a handful of men changing a rout into a victory (this from Holinshed's *History of Scotland*), however sum up this debt. Perhaps Shakespeare used also the *Mirror for Magistrates* for some details.<sup>35</sup> As regards the Queen, she is in part a resuscitation of Dionyza; Cloten (though the name is borrowed from Holinshed) is almost as much of an original creation as the later Caliban, and Shakespeare probably meant him to be a fully realised male counterpart of the shadowy Philoten (Dionyza's daughter) who is no more than mentioned in *Pericles*; Belarius and the theft of the boys is probably Shakespeare's invention too. For the central Imogen-Posthumus story, Shakespeare went to Boccaccio's *Decameron* (Second Day, Ninth Tale) and perhaps also used one or two other versions of the wager story — for example, *Frederick of Jennen* and the tale of the Fishwife of Strand in *Westward for Smelts*. There are several details in these two versions that are repeated in Shakespeare but are not found in Boccaccio. For example, by making the villain (not the husband) propose the wager and by making the heroine

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix by H. F. Brooks to the *New Arden* edition of the play edited by J. M. Nosworthy.

ask the servant to kill her as directed by his master (her husband), Shakespeare follows these versions in preference to Boccaccio and thereby humanises Posthumus somewhat and gives a touch of grandeur to Imogen. Again, in *Frederick of Jennen* the husband (as in Shakespeare) regrets the death of his wife even before her innocence is established. Another change Shakespeare made was to elevate the merchant's wife into a Princess, the daughter of the mythical King of Britain, Cymbeline (or Kymbeline). For the contrast between court life and life in the woods, it is as though — recalling *As You Like It* — the Forest of Arden is transplanted in Britain. Anachronisms romp in freely, and Pagan Europe and the England of the Renaissance become strange bedfellows. Yet these seem to matter little, for Imogen somehow imposes a splendorous unity on the play; and one might almost affirm that Imogen is the play, the excuse and explanation of everything else.

Describing Imogen as "the bc-all and end-all of the play", Quiller-Couch continues :

"She has all the wrongs of Desdemona, *plus* the serene courage to conquer them and forgive. She has all the fond trust of Desdemona, with all the steel and wit which Desdemona fatally lacks. Range out the great gallery of good women — Silvia, Portia, Beatrice, Rosalind, Viola, Helena, Isabella, Marina, Perdita, Miranda — Heavens, what a list! — and over all of them Imogen bears the bell".<sup>36</sup>

Among other tributes are Swinburne's : "the woman above all Shakespeare's women . . . the name of the woman best beloved in all the world of song and all the tide of time"; Nathan Drake's : "the most lovely and perfect of Shakespeare's female characters"; Alfred J. Wyatt's : "an almost perfect woman"; Mark Van Doren's : "one of the great women of Shakespeare or the world"; and Gervinus' : "the sum and aggregate of fair womanhood such as at last the poet conceived it". While the critics are thus quick to applaud Imogen, few are at ease with the play itself or its unheroic hero, Leonatus Posthumus. Johnson's strictures are well-known :

"To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon

<sup>36</sup> *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, p. 217.

unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation".

Raleigh remarks that Johnson has but spoken "truly and moderately".<sup>37</sup> And Bernard Shaw found the last Act of *Cymbeline* so atrocious that he had to re-write it in consonance with the canons of Shavian art. Likewise, critics are generally allergic to Posthumus, and very few indeed would be inclined to agree with the First Gentleman's eulogy (I. i. 22 ; 47) :

I do not think  
So fair an outward and such stuff within  
Endows a man but he ...  
... most prais'd, most lov'd,  
A sample to the youngest ; to th' more mature  
A glass that feated them ; and to the graver  
A child that guided dotards.

Yet Swinburne called *Cymbeline* "the play of plays" and found in it depth enough, and subtlety enough, and beauty enough, revealing the presence of the Master, "the one omnipotent Maker among all who bear that name". And Dowden argues that, "because *she* (Imogen) prized Posthumus highly, we must not think him quite undeserving of her" :

By her election may be truly read  
What kind of man he is.

There is also the testimony of the startled Iachimo (I. vi. 168)—

He sits 'mongst men like a descended god :  
He hath a kind of honour sets him off  
More than a mortal seeming —

and of the later contrite Iachimo (V. v. 157):

the good Posthumus —  
What should I say ? he was too good to be  
Where ill men were, and was the best of all  
Amongst the rar'st of good ones.

And *Cymbeline* himself tells us that, at the thick of the fight, the unknown poor soldier in his silly habit (that is, Posthumus in disguise) "sham'd gilded arms" and "his naked breast stepp'd

<sup>37</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 142.

before targes of proof", while the veteran soldier, Belarius, admits he "never saw such noble fury in so poor a thing" (V. v. 7). Posthumus' acceptance of the wager, an aberration certainly, was yet necessary to the story; and, perhaps, Shakespeare thought no more about it. The separation and banishment, the alien surroundings, the 'yellow Iachimo' egging him on, these induce in Posthumus a mood of instability and impatience, and he easily succumbs to the Italian fiend's machinations. But the power of Imogen's love rescues and redeems him; her love being absolute, her power to redeem is no less absolute.

Shakespeare scatters all over the play subtle hints and delicate touches to indicate the strength of Imogen's love for Posthumus. Her love outfaces her father's wrath, her stepmother's hypocrisy and Cloten's imbecility. In Posthumus' absence, she fondly clings to every bit that reminds her of him — especially the bracelet. We are to suppose that it fits her to a nicety when he first puts it on her arm. Then he takes leave of her, and weeks pass; on the fateful night Iachimo removes it from her arm, it comes off "as slippery as the Gordian knot was hard" (II. ii. 34). The explanation is that Imogen has been pining in thought, the bracelet has become too loose for her arm, and yet she has kept it on in a mood of worship, and this is how it slips out when Iachimo wants it. She notices the loss in the morning, but Cloten *would* speak to her just then, and thus it is before him and Pisanio that she says (II. iii. 142):

shrew me,  
If I would lose it for a revenue  
Of any king's in Europe! I do think  
I saw't this morning; confident I am  
Last night 'twas on mine arm; I kiss'd it . . .

She kissed it — a daily ritual — immediately before going to bed. There is a difference in emphasis between *I do think* and *confident I am*. She is *confident* that she had the bracelet and kissed it the previous night, but — "I do think/I saw't this morning". We know she couldn't have so seen it, for it wasn't there; why then does she say that she "saw't this morning"? I feel that Shakespeare wants us to infer that Imogen *dreams* of her bracelet just before she wakes up in the morning. Her waking and sleeping hours are equally consecrated to Posthumus. Hence it

is that it comes as a shock to her that her husband is "partner'd with tomboys" in Italy. "My lord, I fear", she exclaims, "has forgot Britain". To remember Britain would be to remember Imogen, but Posthumus has forgotten both in a swoon or frenzy. Iachimo suggests 'revenge', but she answers with angelic *naivete* (I. vi. 128) :

If this be true —  
As I have such a heart that both mine ears  
Must not in haste abuse — if it be true,  
How should I be reveng'd ?

Love gives her a sixth sense, she still refuses to give full credence to Iachimo's words, and presently condemns her ears for having so long listened to these slanders. Fully provoked at last, she tells him — with brevity and bite — that she disdains him and the devil alike ; and she adds, as if most casually (I. vi. 148) :

The King my father shall be made acquainted  
Of thy assault.

She is a King's daughter, she's every inch a princess, — and woe unto Iachimo if he should forget this fact ! Later, Imogen has a more excruciating trial to undergo, and still she safely comes through. Iachimo's poisonous lie having "drug-damn'd" Posthumus, he plans a 'trap' so that his Pisanio may conveniently kill unsuspecting Imogen. Ignorant of his intentions, *she* only looks forward excitedly to an early reunion (III. ii. 46) :

O for a horse with wings ! Hears't thou, Pisanio ?  
He is at Milford Haven. Read, and tell me  
How far 'tis thither. If one of mean affairs  
May plod it in a week, why may not I  
Glide thither in a day ? Then true Pisanio —  
Who long'st like me to see thy lord, who long'st —  
O, let me 'bate ! — but not like me, yet long'st,  
But in a fainter kind — O, not like me,  
For mine's beyond beyond ...

Imogen's love is truly "beyond beyond". When she reads the terrible words in Posthumus' letter to Pisanio (III. iv), she cannot (in this resembling Desdemona) understand the accusation, she simply doesn't know what to think or do next. Yet even in this extremity, she will not blame Posthumus — not quite ;

perhaps some "jay of Italy" has "betray'd him". Away, however, with all recriminations; she is ready to die (III. iv. 64). When Pisanio unfolds his plan for 'deceiving' his master, Imogen is genuinely distressed by the futility of it all (III. iv. 126):

Why, good fellow,  
What shall I do the while? where bide? how live?  
Or in my life what comfort, when I am  
Dead to my husband?

Even so, she soon eagerly clutches at the straw of hope held out by the faithful Pisanio, and what spurs her on is the unuttered thought that she might yet save her husband and redeem him somehow. While in the days following the thought of Posthumus' "betrayal" gnaws her within, she will not permit any erosion of her love. She feels drawn to Guiderius and Arviragus, but it is not consciously or admittedly brotherly love; it disturbs her a little, and these words involuntarily escape her (III. vi. 86):

Pardon me, gods!  
I'd change my sex to be companion with them.  
Since Leonatus' false.

Even to be merely 'companion' with Guiderius and Arviragus, she thinks she will have to be born anew as a man!

If Imogen's is such absolute love, she also inspires love beyond reason in others. Iachimo himself, at the height of his villainy, is conscious of the power of her beauty (II. ii. 17):

'Tis her breathing that  
Perfumes the chamber thus. The flame o' th' taper  
Bows toward her and would under-peep her lids  
To see th' enclosed lights, now canopied  
Under these windows white and azure. Iac'd  
With blue of heaven's own tinct.

She inspires a demented passion even in "that harsh, noble, simple nothing, that Cloten". Doltish as he is, he is duly conscious of her perfections: "from every one/The best she hath, and she, of all compounded,/Outsells them all" (III. v. 73). Guiderius and Arviragus lose their hearts to her without knowing why, for "love's reason's without reason" (IV. ii. 22). Almost every character in the play — only the



Queen, perhaps, excepted — thus comes under the spell of Imogen. As for the errant Posthumus, no sooner he receives the bloody handkerchief in apparent proof of his wife's death, reaction and repentance set in. He still thinks her 'guilty', but is he so guiltless himself that he should dare to judge another — and Imogen of all persons? He therefore cries in his anguish that the Gods should have struck him down and spared her — that she might repent! Imogen had said, "My lord, I fear, has forgot Britain"; now Posthumus, by fighting as a common soldier on Britain's behalf, will partly at least put his love to the test and make an offering to his dead mistress. In V. iv, while he lies asleep in prison his dream images further batter down Posthumus' self-defences.<sup>38</sup> When at last, in the final scene, he learns the stark truth, the dam of his self-control bursts its bonds and anger like a thunder-storm uproots him, and he is carried headlong by the avalanching flood of his passionate remorse (V. v. 213):

O, give me cord, or knife, or poison,  
Some upright justicer! Thou, King, send out  
For torturers ingenious. It is I  
That all th' abhorred things o' th' earth amend  
By being worse than they. I am Posthumus,  
That kill'd thy daughter: villain-like, I lie —  
That caus'd a lesser villain than myself.  
A sacrilegious thief, to do't. The temple  
Of virtue was she; yea, and she herself.  
Spit, and throw stones, cast mire upon me, set  
The dogs o' th' street to bay me. Every villain  
Be call'd Posthumus Leonatus, and  
Be villainy less than I was. O Imogen!  
My queen, my life, my wife! O Imogen,  
Imogen, Imogen!

Although Imogen has long drawn her breath in pain in this harsh world only in anticipation of this moment, she is yet unequal to this torrential agony and so tries to reassure him. But he

<sup>38</sup> The Masque, Vision and Tablet in V. iv have often been condemned as inferior to the rest of the play, and as a needless excrescence, probably introduced by somebody other than Shakespeare. On the other hand, these have also been defended, since their aim is to show the reality of divine participation in human affairs. (For a summary view of the controversy see the *Warwick* edition of the play, ed. by A. J. Wyatt, pp. 218ff.) Wilson Knight's vigorous defence appears in his *The Crown of Life*, pp. 168ff.

takes her to be a merely scornful page and throws her down. Pisanio intervenes, and comes out with the truth ; more explanations follow, and another sudden wave lifts the lovers to the crest of felicity (V. v. 261) :

*Imogen.* Why did you throw your wedded lady from you ?  
Think that you are upon a rock, and now  
Throw me again.

(*Embracing him*)

*Posthumus.* Hang there like fruit, my soul,  
Till the tree die.

As Quiller-Couch points out, Shakspeare "never wrote five lines more exquisitely poignant than these".

Imogen loves, and inspires love ; and, besides, she is a darling of versatility and a paragon of femineity. A princess, she is yet no spoilt creature ; taking her to be a boy, her brothers although ignorant of the relationship exchange these comments (IV. ii. 49) :

*Arviragus.* How angel-like he sings !  
*Guiderius.* But his neat cookery ! He cut our roots in characters,  
And saue'd our broths as Juno had been sick,  
And he her dieter.

When she effects the translation from a sheltered princess to a General's page on the field of battle, she extorts from her master this unique acknowledgement (V. v. 85) :

never master had  
A page so kind, so duteous, diligent,  
So tender over his occasions, true,  
So feat, so nurse-like.

But she can be regal in her bearing without effort ; she shows Iachimo his place, she tells Cloten a bit of her mind (II. iii. 124) :

Profane fellow !  
Wert thou the son of Jupiter, and no more  
But what thou art besides, thou wert too base  
To be his (Posthumus') groom ...

In the last Act, again, we discover one more facet of her character. Pardoned herself, she is permitted by the King to ask

a boon. All present expect her to request the King to spare her master's life. But she answers with a bluntness that almost sounds brutal in the context (V.v. 102); she has seen her ring on Iachimo's finger, she must have an explanation, and so her master's life "must shuffle for itself". Elsewhere, when Imogen is angry, when her resentment flares up, when hypocrisy stings her, when brazen effrontery quickens her to high and haughty disdain, always her tongue finds words adequate to the mood or occasion. If her behaviour in the Temptation Scene (I. vi) is queenly in its dignity and semi-divine in its self-control, in that other harrowing scene (III. iv) where she reads her husband's cruel letter to Pisanio, she hurls at him words that prod fiercely his already wounded soul. In the *Ramayana*, the divine Sita is still human enough to misunderstand the utterly loyal and devoted Lakshman and wound him with words that are worse than daggers. Imogen too is more truly Imogen when she blends resentment and resignation, love and despair, in the extraordinary speech (III. iv. 73) :

Why, I must die ;  
And if I do not by thy hand, thou art  
No servant of thy master's. Against self-slaughter  
There is a prohibition so divine  
That cravens my weak hand. Come, here's my heart —  
Something's afore't. Soft, soft ! we'll no defence ! —  
Obedient as the scabbard. What is here ?  
The scriptures of the loyal Leonatus  
All turn'd to heresy ? Away, away ...

She has kept her husband's letters — the *scriptures* of the *loyal* Leonatus : now 'loyal' no more ! — alongside of her heart ; and since her husband's love is dead, let the letters go too, let them offer no defence when Pisanio strikes at her heart ! It is true she is less than just to him when she indulges in sharp-shooting as in (III. iv. 100) :

Wherefore then  
Didst undertake it ? Why hast thou abus'd  
So many miles with a pretence ? This place ?  
Mine action and thine own ? our horses' labour ?  
The time inviting thee ? the perturb'd court,  
For my being absent ?

Yet, seventy-five lines later, her horizon brightens up unexpectedly and she tells the same Pisanio : "Thou art all the comfort/ The gods will diet me with". Again, in the last scene, she meets his anxious query "How fares my mistress?" with the bottomlessly unjust words (V. v. 236) :

O, get thee from my sight ;  
Thou gavest me poison. Dangerous fellow, hence !  
Breathe not where princes are.

But everything is forgiven her because she has suffered greatly and it is a conspiracy of circumstances that has for a while blurred her vision and blunted her generosity of understanding. But all's well at the end, and Pisanio is as happy as the reunited lovers.

Other incidents in the play reveal the loving wife, the womanly woman, the half-scarcd Fidele, the sister surprised by sudden joy ; Belarius calls her an earthly paragon, "divineness no elder than a boy" ; and when all the clouds scatter away, she finds the most appropriate words (V. v. 374) :

O my gentle brothers,  
Have we thus met ? O, never say hereafter  
But I am truest speaker ! You call'd me brother.  
When I was but your sister : I you brothers,  
When we were so indeed.

The most transcendently feminine trait in Imogen, however, is her capacity to smile and sigh at the same time reflecting, like summer shower in glorious sunshine, the intangible graces of even this imperfect world. Observant Arviragus has made a note of this (IV. ii. 52) :

Nobly he yokes  
A smiling with a sigh, as if the sigh  
Was that it was for not being such a smile ;  
The smile mocking the sigh that it would fly  
From so divine a temple to commix  
With winds that sailors rail at.

Seen in this light, Imogen's most characteristically feminine speech is this (I. iii. 17) :

I would have broken mine eye-strings, crack'd them but  
To look upon him, till the diminution

Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle ;  
 Nay, followed him till he had melted from  
 The smallness of a gnat to air, and then  
 Have turn'd mine eye and wept.

Even as she speaks the words her streaming tears film her smile, a rainbow brings out her radiant femineity, and she stands revealed as the 'peerless' Imogen, for she is indeed — to quote Iachimo (of all persons !) — "She is alone, the Arabian bird !"

## IV

## THE WINTER'S TALE

While the theme of the first three Acts of *The Winter's Tale* is sexual jealousy and its consequences, the last two Acts take us beyond this limited and rather hackneyed theme. The sequence of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation : the sheep-shearing feast in an atmosphere of Arcadian simplicity : the reign of music, dance, and gaiety : the dents in love and friendship, and the healing of these by the passage of time : spring's promise and autumn's fruition : fathers and children, and the redemption of the former by the latter : the resurrection of the dead, the fulfilment of the Oracle, and the promise of a new heaven and a new earth — all these figure in the last two Acts, and sending creepers towards the earlier Acts and entwining them hold the whole play in an embrace of rounded revelation. Shakespeare has been charged with careless workmanship, bungling, botching, scrambling, imbalance, surplusage ; "the bear is a naughty superfluity" ;<sup>39</sup> the 16-year gap between Acts III and IV is a serious breach ; the great pastoral scene is perversely "interspersed with long-winded intrigues, and disguises, and homilies" ;<sup>40</sup> while there is no lack of variety, the play makes no unified impact on our consciousness ; and the final Statue Scene is an exercise in the sheerly impossible improbable. On the other hand, 'advocatus dei' is no less emphatic. *The Winter's Tale* is more than tragedy or comedy, it is the drama of transcendence enacting

<sup>39</sup> Quiller-Couch, *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, p. 237.

<sup>40</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Literary Essays*, p. 11.

the passage from the realistic to the symbolic, the human to the divine. In Tillyard's words,

"It is almost as if he (Shakespeare) aimed at rendering the complete theme of *The Divine Comedy* ... The motives of hell and purgatory in Leontes are obvious enough, while the statue scene is conducted in a rarefied atmosphere of contemplation that suggests the motive of paradise".<sup>41</sup>

Again, Wilson Knight reads *The Winter's Tale* as a poetic demonstration of the affirmation in 1 Corinthians, XV, 36 : "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die"; and the play is indeed the drama of the 'Resurrection of the Dead', of the woman sown in dishonour and weakness, and raised in glory and power.<sup>42</sup> And S. L. Bethell, commenting on the last scene, writes :

"In the resurrection the struggle is past; the spell is lawful and the actions shall be holy. This last scene most obviously expresses the future life in terms of the present; its rarefied unearthiness is a foretaste of heaven. The themes of redemption and regeneration, now explicit, are related to a poetic suggestion of fulfilment beyond life".<sup>43</sup>

One point that is worth stressing, perhaps, is that *The Winter's Tale* and, in fact, the last plays of Shakespeare offer no serious problems of comprehension to the Indian student who is familiar with works like Sudraka's *Mrichchakatika*, Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam*, and Bhavabhuti's *Uttara Rama Charita*. Cloten and Imogen recall Samsthana and Vasantasena (in Sudraka's play); Autolycus likewise recalls Sarvilaka in the same play; and Hermione recalls Sakuntala, and the Sita of *Uttara Rama Charita*. Having married Sakuntala in Kanva's hermitage, Dushyanta repudiates her later when she comes to his court; his memory revives almost immediately afterwards, but there is to be no easy reparation and reunion. A period of suffering, remorse and repentance follows. His wandering feet taking him at last to Maricha's hermitage, he sees there his son Bharat, and presently Sakuntala herself — and a sobered chastened purified Dushyanta is reunited to the sadder, older, diviner Sakuntala. In *Uttara Rama Charita*, Rama banishes his Queen, Sita,

<sup>41</sup> *Shakespeare's Last Plays*, p. 84.

<sup>42</sup> *The Crown of Life*, pp. 76ff.

<sup>43</sup> *The Winter's Tale — A Study* (1947), p. 104.

because his spy reports that people are talking ill of her on account of her long stay in Ravana's Asoka Gardens. Rama the lover and husband decides, in deference to Rama the King, to sacrifice what is most precious to him. Sita receives asylum in Valmiki's hermitage, and there Rama's two sons — Lava and Kusa — are born. Years later Rama meets his boys (without knowing them), and presently, while witnessing a play of Valmiki's on the banks of the Ganges, meets Sita too, and there is a final reunion. The parallelism between Hermione on the one hand and Sakuntala and Sita on the other is thus obvious enough. Further, as K. M. Khadye has pointed out,

"The trial scene of *The Winter's Tale* where Hermione stands up so bravely to the accusation brought against her bears a striking resemblance to that scene in the *Mahabharata*, if not in Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam*, where Sakuntala defends herself in the Darbar of Dushyanta; and if in *The Winter's Tale* the Oracle resolves all doubt, in the *Mahabharata* it is the voice from the sky (*Akash Vani*) that does the same duty. If Perdita was left to the tender protection of 'the kites and ravens', Sakuntala was actually brought up by the Sakunta birds. And if the living Hermione appearing as a statue produces such a dramatic effect, does not the going down of Sita into the bowels of the earth and her reappearance with the deities (Ganges and Mother Earth) move the spectator as much?"<sup>44</sup>

There is also the Greek legend of Alcestis, the theme of one of Euripides' tragedies. To save her husband Admetus' life, Alcestis offers to die: Heracles rescues her from the jaws of Hades and restores her to Admetus. Alcestis is heroic in a passive sort of way, but she is no Sita or Hermione. It is not the reunion alone, but also the spiritual transformation brought about by the event, that sets plays like *Sakuntalam*, *Uttara Rama Charita* and *The Winter's Tale* apart, a new species of drama fusing the realistic and mythic modes, and merging aesthetic with religious experience. The time-lag between Acts III and IV, obviously a serious infringement of the 'unity of time', becomes here the very condition of the transcendence from the human to the religious level, the rending of the veil of separation and sorrow, and the unfoldment of the miracle of the Resurrection and the Life.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *The Winter's Tale: A Study*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> See Tom F. Driver, *The Sense of History in Greek and Shakespearean Drama* (1960), pp. 193-4 and 197.

As with the other days, with *The Winter's Tale* too it would be instructive to consider the way in which Shakespeare has handled his sources. The principal (almost the exclusive) source is Robert Greene's romance, *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (1588), republished as *Dorastus and Fawnia* in 1607. In Shakespeare's play, Bohemia and Sicily exchange places: is it because "it was Sicily . . . that gave us the myth of Proserpine or Persephone"?<sup>46</sup> The names are changed: Pandosto=Leontes; Bellaria=Hermione; Egistus=Polixenes; Franion=Camillo; Garinter=Mamillius; Fawnia=Perdita; and Dorastus=Florizel. While the plotting of the play is pretty close to the story, there are a few minor and one or two significant departures also. In Greene's romance, the baby is set afloat in an open boat; Bellaria dies, and doesn't merely swoon; Pandosto, on seeing Fawnia, falls in love with her, and in the end commits suicide; and, above all, as presented by Greene, Pandosto's jealousy is no sudden explosion, but a matter of slow growth during the months of his friend's stay as a guest. Autolycus is wholly Shakespeare's creation; and the sheep-shearing scene also contains Shakespearian elaboration, owing much to his knowledge of rural Warwickshire. Simon Forman saw the play at the Globe on 15 May 1611, but he makes no mention of the statue scene in his *Booke of Plaies*: does it mean that in the play as produced at the Globe Hermione's resurrection was *not* presented? Was it because Shakespeare didn't want to repeat the Pericles-Thaisa scene of recognition that he abridged the Leontes-Perdita recognition scene into a mere report (V. ii. 9ff) and lavished all his art on the statue scene?<sup>47</sup>

In the play as we now have it, Shakespeare has made Leontes' jealousy a sudden unaccountable eruption. The Leontes of Acts I-III is rather a worse person than Greene's Pandosto; but through the elimination of the motif of even unconscious incestuous attraction, the Leontes of Act V becomes a much finer character than Greene's hero. He has gone through 'fire and brimstone', shed the dross of the rusts, and emerged pure and

<sup>46</sup> Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life*, p. 128. Mentioning Shakespeare's indebtedness to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, J. H. P. Pafford too refers to the Proserpine myth (*The New Arden* edition, p. xxxiv). Pafford also gives the complete text of *Pandosto* as an appendix, and his discussion of the 'sources' (pp. xxvii-xxxvii) is most valuable.

<sup>47</sup> See Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare: The Final Plays*, p. 31.



benevolent. The moment Leontes lies low, — prostrate, crushed, humbled, — Grace begins to work in his favour, although *he* doesn't know it, and will not know it for some 16 years. His castaway daughter is saved ; she grows into auspicious girlhood, and proves the means of his rehabilitation and redemption.

The sexual jealousy theme has already figured in several of Shakespeare's plays. In *Troilus and Cressida*, the young hero has visible proof — *pratyaksha pramāna* — of Cressida's guilt ; this causes an insurrection in his mind and soul, for he cannot believe that *this* Cressida is *that* other Cressida he had known. He must somehow reconcile himself to this new poisoned image, but he must also punish on the battle-field his cheeky rival Diomed. In *Much Ado*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, however, the jealousy is wholly baseless. In *Much Ado*, Hero the bride-to-be is defamed by Don John ; some kind of visible proof is fabricated — under cover of darkness a stranger calling 'Hero' and a woman from a balcony responding — and Claudio is just imposed upon. After the brutal accusation in the Church, Hero swoons, and it is given out that she is dead ; but when the mist clears she returns to life and marries Claudio after all. The *Much Ado* situation is developed in *The Winter's Tale* : it is a married Hero (and a mother) that is calumniated by a husband (and a father), and with much less excuse. In *Othello*, Desdemona's 'good name' is taken away by the demi-devil Iago, and Othello is easily imposed upon ; Cassio's talk about Bianca is overheard by Othello, and Iago makes him believe that Cassio has been talking really about Desdemona ; the handkerchief, of course, plays an important part in enacting the illusion of Desdemona's guilt ; and, finally, there are the psychological factors — Othello's colour and his age — that facilitate Iago's perfidy. Othello is at last enabled to pierce the veil of illusion and see the truth — but a little too late. In *Cymbeline*, Imogen is calumniated by Iachimo : Posthumus is deceived with a phoney recital and a stolen bracelet, but by accepting the 'wager' in the first instance he had already half-damned himself. Imogen, however, 'returns to life', and is reunited to her husband. In *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione is accused by her own husband, and he has neither *pratyaksha pramāna*, nor a villain like a Don John (or Iago, or Iachimo) to throw the blame upon and plead extenuating circumstances for his monstrous behaviour. With Claudio,

Othello and Posthumus, deliberate deception or fabrication by others plays a more important part than self-delusion. The sufferings of Othello's and Posthumus' were thus partly at least attributable to others, but Leontes' flow directly from his own actions. When we range these jealous men in the chronological order of their creation by Shakespeare, — Claudio, Othello, Posthumus, Leontes, — we see diminishing justification for their actions; and for Leontes there seems to be *no* possible excuse whatsoever. Shakespeare, it would seem, has deliberately eliminated the motive provided by Greenc :

"This honest familiarity increased dayly more and more betwixt them (Bellaria and Egistus) : for Bellaria, noting in Egistus a princely and bountifull minde, adorned with sundry and excellent qualities, and Egistus finding in her a vertuous and curteous disposition, there grew such a secret uniting of their affections, that one could not well be without the company of the other."

There is no hint of all this in the play; Leontes' jealousy explodes rather than makes its appearance (I. ii. 108) :

Too hot, too hot !  
To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods.  
I have tremor cordis on me ; my heart dances,  
But not for joy, not joy . . .

It is as if Mount Etna has begun spouting forth lava of a sudden ! In Coleridge, while there is a clear reason for the Ancient Mariner's periodic agonies, there is none such for Christabel's. Why should the pure and innocent girl come under the evil influence of Geraldine ? Evil is a mystery that always baffles our mere understanding ; it is an unpredictable spurt from somewhere, and so it can seize a Leontes and madden him with sexual jealousy even though his wife may be angelical in her purity and utter chastity. Those not prone to jealousy may be as fatefully infected as those easily susceptible to the attentions of the sinister 'green-eyed' monster ; once the evil is permitted entrance, it multiplies microbe-like, it takes full possession of body, mind and soul. Leontes' images are nakedly sensual, and he piles image on image with a frenzy that is terrifying (I. ii. 186 ; 284) :

Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a fork'd one !  
Go, play, boy, play ; thy mother plays, and I  
Play too ; but so disgrac'd a part, whose issue

Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamour  
Will be my knell. Go, play, boy, play. There have been,  
Or I am much deceiv'd, cuckolds ere now ...

... Should all despair

That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind  
Would hang themselves. Physic for't there's none;  
It is a bawdy planet, that will strike  
Where 'tis predominant; and 'tis powerful, think it,  
From east, west, north, and south. Be it concluded,  
No barricado for a belly ...

Is whispering nothing?

Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?  
Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career  
Of laughter with a sigh? — a note infallible  
Of breaking honesty. Horsing foot on foot?  
Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift;  
Hours, minutes; noon, midnight? And all eyes  
Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,  
That would unseen be wicked — is this nothing?  
Why, then the world and all that's in't is nothing;  
The covering sky is nothing; Bohemia is nothing;  
My wife is nothing; nor nothing have these nothings.  
If this be nothing.

Mark Van Doren says aptly that Leontes' mind is one "in which images of his betrayal work like maggots, swarming and increasing with every moment of his thought ... He must develop every idea until it is grotesque, and his brain exhausts itself in a search for terms and analogies; though it soon is itself again, and rages on".<sup>48</sup> Is there any cause in 'nature' that makes these mad men? Leontes is dead to all reason: Camillo, Antigonus, Paulina, Hermione herself — all plead in vain. Some of Shakespeare's best poetry is put into Hermione's mouth (II. i. 105):

There's some ill planet reigns.

I must be patient till the heavens look  
With an aspect more favourable. Good my lords,  
I am not prone to weeping, as our sex  
Commonly are — the want of which vain dew  
Perchance shall dry your pities — but I have  
That honourable grief lodg'd here which burns  
Worse than tears down ...

... Do not weep, good fools;

There is no cause; when you shall know your mistress

<sup>48</sup> *Shakespeare*, pp. 273-4.

Has deserv'd prison, then abound in tears  
As I come out : this action I now go on  
Is for my better grace.

Again, in the great Trial Scene (III. ii. 89) :

Sir, spare your threats.  
The bug which you would fright me with I seek.  
To me can life be no commodity.  
The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,  
I do give lost, for I do feel it gone,  
But know not how it went ; my second joy  
And first fruits of my body, from his presence  
I am barr'd, like one infectious ; my third comfort,  
Starr'd most unluckily, is from my breast —  
The innocent milk in it most innocent mouth —  
Hal'd out to murder ; myself on every post  
Proclaim'd a strumpet ; with immodest hatred  
The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs  
To women of all fashion ; lastly, hurried  
Here to this place, i' th' open air, before  
I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,  
What blessings I have here alive  
That I should fear to die. Therefore proceed.  
But yet hear this — mistake me not : no life,  
I prize it not a staw, but for mine honour . . .  
I do refer me to the oracle :  
Apollo be my judge.

The sealed-up oracle is opened and read, — *Hermione is chaste ; Polixenes blameless ; Camillo a true subject ; Leontes a jealous tyrant ; his innocent babe truly begotten, . . .* — and while Hermione responds with the single word 'Praised !', Leontes is first half-incredulous, but presently breaks out into the tremendous blasphemy of —

There is no truth at all i' th' oracle.  
The sessions shall proceed. This is mere falsehood.

Retribution follows instantaneously. Mamillius is reported dead, Hermione swoons — and Paulina reports her dead too. When Paulina speaks pins and daggers to him (III. iii. 172ff), Leontes merely says :

Go on, go on.  
Thou canst not speak too much ; I have deserv'd  
All tongues to talk their bitt'rest.

The shocks have suddenly sobered him as a downpour puts out a fire; Grace gently takes him in hand. He will weep, he will daily visit the chapel where Mamillius and Hermione lie:

So long as nature  
Will bear up with this exercise, so long  
I daily vow to use it.

If the mingling of Apollo's anger (III. ii. 143) and the Christian notion of 'grace' seems like the grafting of a humaner theological system on the earlier Pagan one, Shakespeare might answer in self-defence that in the order of 'great creating nature' this is permissible and even inevitable. Commenting on the seminal dialogue between Perdita and Polixenes in IV. iii —

*Polixenes.* Wherefore, gentle maiden,  
Do you neglect then (carnations and gillyvors)?  
*Perdita.* For I have heard it said  
There is an art which in their piedness shares  
With great creating nature.  
*Polixenes.* Say there be;  
Yet nature is made better by no mean  
But nature makes that mean; so over that art,  
Which you say adds to nature, is an art  
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry  
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,  
And make conceive a bark of baser kind  
By bud of nobler race. This is an art  
Which does mend nature — change it rather; but  
The art itself is nature.  
*Perdita.* So it is . . . —

Wilson Knight says: "The whole question of the naturalist and transcendental antinomy . . . No logical deduction is to be drawn; or rather, the logic is dramatic, made of opposing statements, which serve to conjure up an awareness of nature as an all-powerful presence, at once controller and exemplar"<sup>40</sup> It is also in consonance with the dynamics of 'great creating nature' that Pagan and Christian ideas should fuse to insinuate the total meaning of the play. Again, M. Mahood writes:

"The presiding deity of the play may be Apollo, but the Christian scheme of redemption is a leading element, though not by any means the

<sup>40</sup> *The Crown of Life*, p. 103.

only element, in its pattern of ideas. *Grace*, with *gracious* a keyword in the play, is frequently used in its theological sense of 'the divine influence which operates in men to regenerate and sanctify'.<sup>50</sup>

Time, in IV. i. 24, speaks of "Perdita, now grown in grace"; Perdita addresses Florizel as "my gracious lord" (IV. iv. 5); and she welcomes Polixenes and Camillo with "Grace and remembrance be to you both" (IV. iv. 76). When, a little later, she addresses Proserpina — and talks of Dis's waggon, Juno's eyes, Cythrea's breath, and Phoebus in his strength — we have again the handiwork of 'great creating nature', for here (in Douglas Bush's words) "Nature has eliminated, or transformed, bookish classicism. Ovidian allusion is at once assimilated by English senses into the English scene and invests with 'mythic' glamour the idea of fertility and renewal".<sup>51</sup> Divine wrath is exceeded by the grace of Grace, damnation is to be annulled by redemption, and bleak winter and death by spring and renewal. Leontes too is all humanity, he is Everyman; there, but for the grace of God, anybody might rave as Leontes does, anybody might forge the warrant for his own Hell or Purgatory.

It seems most likely, then, that Shakespeare intended Leontes' jealousy to be unpredictably sudden, without any semblance of excuse whatever, even as Iago's villainy is without any really valid motive. Other explanations (apart from the theory of mere bungling on Shakespeare's part) have also been offered by critics. Dover Wilson, for example, thinks that the actor who plays Leontes "should display signs of jealousy from the very outset and make it clear, as he easily may, that the business of asking Polixenes to stay longer is merely the device of jealousy seeking proof".<sup>52</sup> As if proof not forthcoming during a stay of nine whole months can appear now — or in the course of just one more week! A more ingenious explanation, in terms of Freudian psychology, has been put forward by J. I. M. Stewart. Of the three layers of jealousy — *competitive* or normal, *projected*, and *delusional* — Leontes' comes under the two latter categories: it is 'projected' jealousy because he transfers to

<sup>50</sup> *Shakespeare's Wordplay*, pp. 150-1. Also S. L. Bethell, Introduction to the *New Clarendon* edition, pp. 28ff.

<sup>51</sup> 'Classical Myth in Shakespeare's Plays' in *Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies presented to F. P. Wilson* (1959), p. 81.

<sup>52</sup> The *New Shakespeare* edition of *The Winter's Tale*, p. 131.

Hermione his own infidelities in fact or imagination, and 'delusional' because he translates his own homosexual love for Polixenes as the adulterous love of Hermione. By eschewing the superficially convincing realism in Greene, Shakespeare is not messing up the motivation of Leontes' jealousy:

"Rather he is penetrating to nature, and once more giving his fable something of the demonic quality of myth or folk-story, which is commonly nearer to the radical workings of the human mind than are later and rationalised versions of the same material ... it may be that Shakespeare clears away obvious motives for much the same reason as the psychologist: to give us some awareness of motives lying deeper down".<sup>53</sup>

But all this — Leontes' 'infidelities' and homosexual predilections — is mere speculation, little warranted by the text. The suddenness of the jealousy is clearly meant to be the cardinal inexplicable fact of the play. Not self-will and pride, but faith and humility, are the armour we need against the unpredictable invasion of Evil.

In one respect, Leontes recalls Angelo of *Measure for Measure*. Both are 'unpleasant' characters who are shown in a few terrible scenes and then left to shift for themselves. Sir John Gielgud, who has played both the roles, thinks that they are "stylised and symbolic, and tremendously concentrated". The eruption of lust in one and jealousy in the other is wholly sudden, and stuns us as much as it stuns Isabella or Hermione. Yet Angelo and Leontes are no mere monsters, however monstrous their behaviour in the play. I felt that, in the production of *The Winter's Tale* at the Phoenix Theatre in London on 20 September 1951, John Gielgud did bring out Leontes' essential humanity without toning down his jealousy. The first scene having been cut, the play began with Polixenes' speech:

Nine changes of the wat'ry star hath been  
The shepherd's note since we have left our throne  
Without a burden ...

<sup>53</sup> *Character and Motive in Shakespeare*, p. 36. The arguments for and against the notion of 'Jealousy from the start' have been summed up by J. H. P. Pafford (*The New Arden* edition, 1963, foot-note on pp. lvii-iii). Pafford also inclines to the view that jealousy in Leontes comes as a sudden eruption.

Leontes answered from the opposite end, and Hermione (Diana Wynyard) watched the proceedings from the centre. The princely exchanges were quick and strident: Leontes, aggressively importunate; Polixenes, affable but unyielding; Hermione, animated but silent. There are no more than 80 lines between "Tonguetied, our Queen?" and "Too hot, too hot!"—and as one reads the printed text one is overwhelmed by the sudden surge of jealousy, for Leontes' violence seems to be in excess of the needs of the situation as it has been unfolded so far. It is here that the actor can clothe the action with the air of immediate plausibility. Hermione should be innocent, yet unwittingly give some cause to her husband to respond to the promptings of evil suggestion. In the production at the Phoenix, while Hermione advanced towards Polixenes, took his hands in hers, turned words into music and smiles into compulsive logic, there at the other end stood Leontes, watching, waiting, wavering, and his face and his hardly perceptible gestures enacted the *birth* of Jealousy. The rest followed as a matter of sheer mathematical necessity. Was Leontes-Gielgud mad—or was he only maddened by that show of more than formal cordiality which conveyed envenomed arrows to his very soul? Things seemed to move with a predestined precipitancy, and the climax was reached when this frail man—a King yet also a man—chose to blaspheme against the gods. Retribution following, Leontes' despairing guilt-conscious cry—

Apollo's angry; and the heavens themselves  
Do strike at my injustice—

struck the keynote of his returning sanity. Here was the 'anagnorisis' that ever forces the tragic hero to recognise his own hapless reflection in the confronting glass. The swiftly following news of Hermione's 'death' but completed the circuit of his self-forged tribulations. And so the curtain fell, to our unfeigned relief. Acts I-III were presented as a single span of action, and the drama as a whole was conceived as a trilogy—a Bohemian play wedged between two Sicilian plays. When V. i begins, long years of silent sorrow and prayerful expiation have made a new man of Leontes, and his counsellor Cleomenes assures him:



Sir, you have done enough, and have perform'd  
A saint-like sorrow. No fault could you make  
Which you have not redeem'd ; indeed, paid down  
More penitence than done trespass.

But Leontes will not hear of marriage again, having "kill'd" so good a wife as Hermione (V. i. 56) :

No more such wives ; therefore, no wife. One worse,  
And better us'd, would make her sainted spirit  
Again possess her corpse, and on this stage,  
Where we offend her now, appear soul-vex'd,  
And begin 'Why to me' ...

When the lost daughter is found, when the rejected friend returns, and even the dead Hermione is new-endowed with life, the scene is set — not for a sham reconciliation — but a blissful reunion redolent of rarefied unearthiness and giving intimations of the deep power of Grace.

## V

## THE TEMPEST

Leaving out the History Plays and ignoring strict chronology, the plays of Shakespeare are divided by Syed Mehdi Imam under plays of twilight, plays of the dark, and plays of light. The plays of twilight are tragedies like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, the four great tragedies are plays of the dark, while among the plays of light are the Romantic Comedies. Whereas the plays of light swing towards joy, those of twilight and the dark to sadness or tragedy, and the History Plays to realism, "*The Tempest* moves naturally to a close of serenity and repose", being "the point of equilibrium in the works of Shakespeare".<sup>54</sup> Wilson Knight affirms likewise that *The Tempest* is a recordation in miniature of "the separate themes of Shakespeare's greater plays ... it distils the poetic essence of the whole Shakespearian universe".<sup>55</sup> It was thus with a sure sense of propriety that Heminge and Condell gave *The Tempest* the place of

<sup>54</sup> *Mother India*, XI, Nn. 2 (March 1959), p. 61.

<sup>55</sup> *The Shakespearian Tempest* (1932), p. 247.

honour in the First Folio, and this hasn't been disturbed by any editor of the 'Complete Works'. Quiller-Couch, indeed, would go further and claim for *The Tempest* a unique eminence among all 'the books written in the world':

"... while I reverence the artist who in *Othello* or in *Lear* purges our passion, forcing us to weep for present human woe, *The Tempest*, as I see it, forces diviner tears, tears for sheer beauty; with a royal sense of this world and how it passes away, with a catch at the heart of what is to come. And still the sense is royal: it is the majesty of art: we *feel* that we are greater than we know. So on the surge of our emotion ... is blown a spray, a mist ... there rides in it a rainbow; and its colours are wisdom and charity, with forgiveness, tender ruth for all men and women growing older, and perennial trust in young love".<sup>56</sup>

*The Tempest* is a short play — one of the shortest in the canon — and was obviously meant for a court performance. The play was, in fact, produced before James I on Hallowmass Night (1 November 1611), and produced again late in 1612 or early in 1613 in connection with the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to the Prince Palatine Elector — almost certainly nearer to the wedding (14 February 1613) than the betrothal (27 December 1612). There must have been other productions also — perhaps even before the first court production. Was the Wedding Masque (IV. i. 60ff) always a part of the play, or was it a later addition to greet the Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine? Were the banquet scene (III. iii) and the anti-mask of dogs (V. i) too later additions? Did the necessity for the addition or additions call for the elimination of other matter that was in the original play — an *Ur-Tempest*? Speculation is almost endless, and all things considered it seems reasonable to conclude that the 'Masque' was always there, and that Shakespeare left *The Tempest* very much as we have it now.<sup>57</sup>

Although Kenneth Muir lists *The Tempest* among the plays for which no immediate source is known, it cannot be said that the hunt for sources has proved altogether fruitless. In 1609 the flagship of a fleet bound for Virginia was wrecked near the coast of the Bermudas: the crew escaped, and out of the remaining 8 ships of the fleet 7 reached their destination safely. The ship-

<sup>56</sup> *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, p. 299.

<sup>57</sup> See J. Dover Wilson's textual Introduction to the *New Shakespeare* edition and Frank Kermode's Introduction to the *New Arden* edition.

wrecked men subsisted somehow for 9 months and ultimately found their way to Virginia in 2 boats improvised by them out of cedar trees. In 1610 accounts of the shipwreck appeared in England, and Shakespeare was certainly indebted to some of these. We read, for example, in Sylvester Jourdain's *A Discovery of the Bermudas* (1610) :

"...it pleased God out of his most gracious and merciful providence, so to direct and guide our ship ... to send her within halfe an English mile, of that land ... the Ilandes of the Bermudas. And there neither did our ship sincke, but more fortunately in so great a misfortune, fell in betweene two rockes, where shee was fast lodged and locked, for further budging ... our feeding and preservation, was beyond our hopes, and all mens expectations most admirable".

William Strachey's letter, *True Repertory of the Wracke*, also gives an account of the storm, the wreck and the life on the island ("Yet it pleased our merciful God, to make even this hideous and hated place, both the place of our safetie, and meanes of our deliverance"), the journey to Virginia, the pitiable condition of the colony, and the 'nature' of the indigenous savages (or salvage men). Although this letter wasn't published till 1625 in *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, Shakespeare evidently had access to the 'True Repertory' and perhaps had even an occasion to meet Strachey. The colonists who underwent such a variety of tribulations could not but see in the whole interlude the clear workings of Providence; and Shakespeare must have found in that 'real story' of the colonists cast on the Bermudas the germs of a Romance that should convey his final vision of a reformed and redeemed humanity, of nature glorified by art, and of man and nature touched by Grace — in short, of fallen Adam and Eve returning to Paradise, or New Jerusalem, not exactly innocent as in those far-off prelapsarian days, but chastened by experience, enriched by 'art', and armoured by Grace.

So much for the background. As regards the Prospero-Miranda-Caliban story, various analogues have been suggested. Wilson Knight mentions the Chinese 16th century story, *Monkey*, centering round the adventures of Tripitaka the hero-saint (= Prospero), with his two servants, Monkey (= Ariel) and Piggy (= Caliban). But, then, — "Did Shakespeare read Chinese?"<sup>88</sup> Again, in the old romance, *Mucedorus*, there is

<sup>88</sup> *The Crown of Life*, p. 230.

Bremer the wild man who might have suggested the idea for Caliban. Among other analogues whose claims have been vigorously canvassed are Ayer's *Die Schöne Sidea* in German, which is about a magician, his daughter, and a captive prince; Antonio de Esclava's *Noches de Invierno* in Spanish about a tempest, a dethroned magician-king, his daughter, a marriage between her and the disinherited son of the usurping enemy; and Calahorra's *Espejo de Principes y Caballeros*, also about a magician, a magic island, magic books and magic storms, and a log-bearing prince. But of course these romantic elements — island magic and strange encounters and happy reunions — are among the ingredients of folk literature anywhere, and it would be unwise to affirm emphatically that Shakespeare was specially or solely indebted to this or that source alone.

If, as seems not unlikely, Shakespeare intended *The Tempest* to be his valedictory to the stage — and *Henry VIII* and Shakespeare's share in *Sir Thomas More* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* needn't invalidate this supposition — what is more reasonable than that he should want to make his play a splendid summing-up of his whole career; a looking-back, a gathering-up of strands of triumphant memory into a gorgeous new web; and even a looking forward, a dream, a hope — for himself, and for humanity also, since all his plays had been about flawed humanity striving to outface its trials and transcend its limitations? The enchanted island with its trapped group is verily a microcosm of humanity. Its utter earthiness is as important as its magic and music partaking of the unearthly and the divine: and between these extremes the whole gamut of the evolutionary experience of man is sought to be comprehended. In this view of the matter, Shakespeare would seem to have borrowed more from himself than from others — returning to *Love's Labour's Lost* in conforming to the 'unities', to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the employment of a beneficent supernatural machinery, to *Measure for Measure* for his protagonist Duke who is masked Providence as well, to his history plays for the abortive insurrections by Antonio-Sebastian and Caliban-Stephano, to *King Lear* and *Pericles* for the storm and the wreck, to the charmed air about Macbeth's castle for the sweet air of Prospero's island, to Camillo of *The Winter's Tale* for his Gonzalo, to all the young lovers that had preceded (including the most

recent, Florizel and Perdita) for Ferdinand and Miranda, and to all the poetry of the English countryside for the flora and fauna of the 'enchanted island'. As Donald A. Stauffer aptly says,

"*The Tempest* is a play of memory ... it glances backward over Shakespeare's whole dramatic career, and summons up for a final curtain all characters from the earlier plays ... The worldly cunning of the histories, the evil of the tragedies, are likewise represented, and are likewise controlled".<sup>59</sup>

The action of *The Tempest* is played, first 'on a ship at sea', 'with a storm raging, and the mariners and men on board excited; from I. ii onwards, the drama is played in different parts of "an Island". In no other play Shakespeare leaves Europe and the Mediterranean, but here he "transplants himself into cloud-land, builds in air, and looks at solid Europe as something afar and less real".<sup>60</sup> This too is only partly true, for the 'island' is really a compound of many simples gathered from familiar England or Europe, it is half real and half mythical, it is both the 'thing' that the senses can grasp and the will-o'-the-wisp 'symbol' that the mind pursues but cannot seize. Discussing what Shakespeare might have wished to convey through the image of the enchanted island, its past history, its future possibility, Wilson Knight says that the "island is, to start with, nature", partaking of Caliban's own supreme unashamed earthiness; it is English and foreign both; semi-tropical, yet recalling the sombreness of Nordic folk-lore; under the governance of nature-spirits that are the expressions of nature's processes and powers; in short, a soil and a climate favourable to an Utopian experiment.<sup>61</sup>

If *Measure for Measure* is a "controlled experiment" (Leavis's phrase), *The Tempest* is one such too — but with this difference. The Duke in *Measure for Measure* is master of the situation from beginning to end: he chooses the moments of departure and return: he is as it were invisibly present all the time: he pulls the strings, he watches the wires. In *The Tempest*, the castaway Duke is providentially led to the island where, with his magic, he rehabilitates himself in a limited way,

<sup>59</sup> *Shakespeare's World of Images*, pp. 302-3.

<sup>60</sup> J. D. Rogers in *Shakespeare's England* (Ed. by Walter Raleigh), Vol. I, p. 194.

<sup>61</sup> *The Crown of Life*, p. 247.

and bides his time. During the return voyage of his enemies from Tunis, Providence gives him a chance to deal with them; with his magic he raises a storm and causes the shipwreck; and once his enemies are on the 'island', they are in his absolute power. Duke Vincentio, who has no need to have recourse to magic, is more effectual as masked Providence than Duke Prospero with Ariel to do all his miscellaneous biddings. Again, Prospero is more personally involved in the action — he has a marriage to promote, old scores to settle, old sores to heal — than the other Duke, whose personal involvement comes out only at the very end when he proposes marriage to Isabella. Yet, again, in spite of this anxious personal interest in the outcome of the experiment, Prospero (no more than Vincentio) quite finds his way to our hearts. Prospero is no doubt an impressive and awesome sort of figure, he has suffered much, long years of loneliness have soured him, he is loved neither by Caliban whom he has 'educated' nor by Ariel whom he has 'freed', and Miranda herself — the moment Ferdinand comes upon the scene — feels infinitely more at ease with him than with her father whom doubtless she loves and venerates. It is easier to exchange pulses even with Leontes or Posthumus than with the all too sufficient and correct and austere Prospero.

The difficulty with Prospero (as with Duke Vincentio) is that it is not possible to take him simply as a human being — as we can a Hamlet, an Othello, a Lear, and even a Macbeth. Prospero is a man, and also (quite obviously) a symbol. But symbol for what? In his study of *The Tempest* called *Shakespeare's Mystery Play* (1921: reprinted in 1936 as *The Timeless Theme*), Colin Still reared an edifice of interpretation on the basis of the equations: Prospero = God; Caliban = the Devil; Ariel = the Angel of the Lord; Miranda = the Celestial Bride; and so on. But, then, there is so much in the play that has the colour of everyday reality — the opening scene on board the ship, the pointless but characteristic talk of the noblemen, the abortive Antonio-Sebastian conspiracy, the Stephano-Caliban-Trinculo episode, even the Ferdinand-Miranda romance — that we feel reluctant to push any symbolistic or 'morality' parallel all along the way. Whatever else it may be, *The Tempest* is a drama of human action played by recognisable human persons who are in the grip of human passions or emotions. If Shakes-

peare, in presenting Prospero, turns him into a symbol without quite destroying his humanity, in delineating Ariel and Caliban, the dramatist endows symbols with touches of humanity and makes them *real*, far more real, in fact, than an Adrian or a Francisco. The quintessential quality of *The Tempest* is perhaps best brought out by Dover Wilson when he compares it with *King Lear*, another play with a storm :

"In *King Lear* Shakespeare succeeded in showing Truth, at its bleakest and most terrifying, as Beauty; in *The Tempest* he succeeded in showing Beauty, at its serenest, most magical and most blessed, as Truth".<sup>62</sup>

It is our experience that Beauty sooner takes our imagination captive than Truth, and it thus calls for some effort to seize the Beauty of *The Tempest* and see it as Truth. As David William writes :

"*The Tempest* is not only a difficult play; it is uniquely beautiful; and its difficulty is that its beauty lies principally in the region of its interior ... The climax of *The Tempest* is a moral decision".<sup>63</sup>

When Ariel feelingly reports to Prospero about the utter discomfort of his enemies, the old man is touched at a tender spot and says (V. i. 21) :

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling  
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,  
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,  
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?  
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part; the rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance; they being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further.

Nay more; Prospero will voluntarily relinquish the means that have placed his enemies in his power and made both punishment and forgiveness possible (V. i. 50) :

But this rough magic  
I here abjure ... I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book.

<sup>62</sup> *The Essential Shakespeare*, p. 145.

<sup>63</sup> *Jacobean Shakespeare* (Ed. by J. R. Brown and B. Harris), p. 134.

A little "heavenly music" to ease the effects of the 'tempest' (the double tempest without and within), and there an end!

Structurally *The Tempest* is important because the 12-year interval between the usurpation of Prospero's Dukedom and its recovery is indicated in the play, not by any such contrivance as a choral speech by Time in *The Winter's Tale* (IV. i), but by adroitly managed retrospective narration. The scheme of these last two plays comprises, not only the bleak deserts of crime and destruction and waste, but also the passage to a new Eden with spring and its tender new leaves signifying the promise of approaching Plenty and Prosperity. But the long time-gap (16 years, or 12 years) between the 'winter' and the 'spring' is apt to damage the illusion of dramatic time. Did Ben Jonson rebuke Shakespeare for making *Cymbeline* too loose in its construction and for throwing carelessly three plays together as *The Winter's Tale*? At any rate, in *The Tempest* Shakespeare simplified the pattern so ruthlessly that it is practically no more than Act V of a *Winter's Tale*-like dramatic sequence but set forth in the form of a five-act play. The 'crime' is pushed into the past; the interval between the 'crime' and the 'forgiving' is taken for granted; and the whole play is devoted to the dynamics of forgiving, reconciliation and reconstruction. On the other hand, as F. R. Leavis reminds us,

"With the absence of the time-gap goes also an absence of that depth and richness of significance given, in *The Winter's Tale*, by the concrete presence of time in its rhythmic processes, and by the association of human growth, decay and rebirth with the vital rhythms of nature at large".<sup>64</sup>

*The Tempest* of course is no less a masterpiece than *The Winter's Tale*; only it is of another kind. Structurally *The Winter's Tale* is more like a modern novel, *The Tempest* more like a play of Sophocles', Racine's, or Ibsen's; there is more comprehension there, more concentration here. In both the plays human credulity is sometimes stretched almost to breaking point by what Leavis calls the "fairy-tale licence of spirit, theme and development", but then it is the sovereign privilege and destiny of poetry to dare the impossible, invade the invisible, and to make the everyday lie the Truth of the imagination. Evil undoubtedly

<sup>64</sup> *The Common Pursuit*, p. 180.



exists in our woefully cabined Euclidean world : the soul is tainted by sin, and crimes of one or another kind mangle human lives and human harmony. But what is the remedy ? The answer to evil is not more evil but Good ; the answer to hate is not more vitriolic hate but Love ; the answer to ugliness is not further perversion but the advent of Beauty. When a haystack has been consumed by fire, the answer is not to set fire to another haystack in the vicinity of the culprit's house but to await the next autumn and its abundant harvest of hay. Let the dead past bury the dead ; let not the innocent children inherit the poisoned earth of their fathers but rather a land bedewed and freshened and putting forth plentiful sticky leaves and shoots. Crime doesn't after all pay — not in the long run, and often not even in the short run. In Christopher Fry's *Thor with Angels*, the impact of the Christian ethic on the primitive Anglo-Saxon is movingly presented ; in the later play, *The Dark is Light Enough*, the categorical imperatives of human charity as against the vindictive claims of all our yesterdays guide the actions of the heroine. Shakespeare was a full-blooded Renaissance man rather than a Christian pietist or idealist ; yet in his last plays, and certainly in *The Tempest*, he was led by the sheer logic of his artistic and spiritual development to state the Christian ethic of repentance, forgiving and reconciliation in terms of everyday practicality. To rake up the past is to lose the present and jeopardise the future ; 'virtue' is better than 'vengeance' ; and the wise course would be to follow Prospero's advice (V. i. 199) :

Let us not burden our remembrance with  
A heaviness that's gone.

Prospero father of Miranda, Prospero the exiled Duke anxious to get his Dukedom back, Prospero the magician, Prospero the wiry, ascetic, ageing, severe personage, Prospero with his stern sacramental attitude to marriage, Prospero who rises equal to the double decision involved in renouncing vengeance and also renouncing magic — these divers Prosperos are nevertheless all of a piece. Kermode thus writes of him :

"As a mage he controls nature ; as a prince he conquers the passions which had excluded him from his kingdom and overthrown law ; as a scholar he repairs his loss of Eden ; as a man he learns to temper his

passions, an achievement essential to success in any of the other activities".<sup>65</sup>

Of Prospero's 'art' and its ramifications, Wilson Knight says that it is "pietistic and naturalistic, as natural as Christ's, as Cerimon's (in *Pericles*), as Paulina's, and to nature he returns it, burying his staff and drowning his book . . . He is a god-man, or perhaps the god-in-man".<sup>66</sup> And yet, inspiring though the figure of this 'Shakespearian Superman' is, it just fails to leap into life. He is too much like an Institution, and too little like a person. It is here that Caliban magnificently scores over him. Dryden said that Shakespeare has made Caliban "a species of himself", and Coleridge wrote: "The character of Caliban is wonderfully conceived . . . Caliban is in some respects a noble being". Quiller-Couch says disarmingly, "Somehow he is not a bad monster", and G. L. Kittredge in his *Shakespeare* (1916) says that, unlike Ariel, Caliban "has a soul, and is therefore capable of moral development, whereas Ariel is but an elemental spirit, without heart, or conscience, or human motives". Ariel is a superlatively efficient electronic machine, of excellent service to its owner, Prospero; but Caliban, brute, savage, 'salvage', flawed, hag-born, deformed, muddled, sensual, though he may be all this, his is still an evolving nature. He might say like Earth in Sri Aurobindo's poem, *The Life Heavens*:

t, Earth, have a deeper power than Heaven;  
My lonely sorrow surpasses its rose-joys.  
A red and bitter seed of the raptures seven;—  
My dumbness fills with echoes of a far voice.

If in Bottom Shakespeare apotheosised the commonplace, in Caliban he has apotheosised the seemingly bestial. *The Tempest* is by no means the story of 'Beauty and the Beast', for here the deformed salvage's slow progress is, not towards Beauty, but towards Truth. Education at Prospero's hand has given Caliban a mastery of language, but the sharpness of his sense perceptions and instinctive reactions is a natural gift. The conjunction of art and nature makes Caliban both a rare poet and an adept in the use of language as a tool in action.

<sup>65</sup> Introduction to the *New Arden* edition (6th edition: 1961), p. xlviii.

<sup>66</sup> *The Crown of Life*, p. 244.

There is no richer poetry in the play than Caliban's description of the island (III. ii. 130) :

The isle is full of noises,  
 Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.  
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
 Will hum about mine ears ; and sometime voices,  
 That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,  
 Will make me sleep again ; and then, in dreaming,  
 The clouds methought would open and show riches  
 Ready to drop upon me, that, when I wak'd,  
 I cried to dream again.

But earlier in the same scene Caliban reveals his shrewd and fiendish sense of practicality in his words to Stephano (III. ii. 83) :

Why, as I told thee, 'tis a custom with him (Prospero)  
 I' th' afternoon to sleep ; there thou mayst brain him,  
 Having first seiz'd his books ; or with a log  
 Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,  
 Or cut his wezand with thy knife. Remember  
 First to possess his books.

When Stephano dreams of the Kingdom, Caliban adds pointedly :  
 " When Prospero is destroyed ". The Caliban who tells Prospero  
 (I. ii. 331),

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,  
 Which thou tak'st from me ...  
 For I am all the subjects that you have,  
 Which first was mine own king ; ...  
 You taught me language, and my profit on't  
 Is, I know how to curse ;

who asks Stephano an hour later, " Hast thou not dropp'd from heaven ? ", and speaks to him coaxingly and insinuatingly  
 (II. ii. 150),

I'll show thee the best of springs ; I'll pluck thee berries ;  
 I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough ...  
 I prithee let me bring thee where crabs grow ;  
 And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts ;  
 Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how  
 To snare the nimble marmoset ; I'll bring thee  
 To clust'ring filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee  
 Young scamels from the rock ;

who creates division between Trinculo and Stephano and plots to crown the latter in Prospero's place as King of the Island, and later growls in irritation "Let it alone, thou fool; it is but trash", and again (IV. i. 229) :

The dropsy drown this fool ! What do you mean  
To dote thus on such luggage ? Let't alone,  
And do the murder first ;

who groans presently "We shall lose our time,/And all be turn'd to barnacles" is also the sadder, wiser Caliban who says, a little while hence (V. i. 261 ; 294) :

O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed !  
How fine my master is ! ...  
... I'll be wise hereafter,  
And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass  
Was I to take this drunkard for a god,  
And worship this dull fool !

Caliban completes in a few hours a full course of education that the children of sophistication may not be able to cover in as many decades !

"Caliban is the ground of the play", says Frank Kermode, and adds :

"His function is to illuminate by contrast the world of art, nurture, civility; the world which none the less nourishes the malice of Antonio and the guilt of Alonso, and stains a divine beauty with the crimes of ambition and lust".<sup>67</sup>

The issue between 'nature' and 'art' has been already stated by Perdita and Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* (IV. iv. 86ff), and Polixenes really argues (perhaps unconsciously) in favour of grafting a peasant stock on a princely one. It is man's evolutionary destiny to temper and refine the order of nature by grafting on it the order of art (or human contrivance and ingenuity) : but this in itself cannot ensure advance, and may very well lead to the perversion of the order of nature. Hence the paramount need for the order of Grace, for what ultimately makes nature supernatural is the induction of Grace. If Caliban is 'nature' in

<sup>67</sup> Introduction to the *New Arden* edition, p. xxv.

the raw (and 'flawed' at birth because of his parentage), Ariel is also 'nature' though only in its aspect of soulless insentient energy (a sort of nuclear contrivance); Prospero is the middle term, or rather the higher synthesis, — 'nature' made noble and virtuous through knowledge and discipline and grace. That 'art' in itself is not enough is shown by Antonio and Sebastian, in whom 'art' has only perverted their humanity, while in Stephano and Trinculo we witness the arrested development of the 'natural man' who is but partly civilised and wise; and Caliban the 'natural' contrasts favourably with all these four, the two villains and the two drunken fools. In Alonso there is a fall from grace followed by the shock of tribulation, and the cure of repentance and redemption. As for the young lovers, Ferdinand and Miranda, they are 'natural' in their simplicity, freshness, sincerity and innocence, and they are also the fullest beneficiaries of the 'art' that good nurture gives them. Gonzalo is good by nature and wise through nurture; he is, as it were the *bass*, the *sruti*, the frame of reference. And so *The Tempest* could be read if we liked as a study of the cross-fertilisations of the three orders — nature, art, Grace — and the various emergent human types, but 'types' that are also (thanks to the dramatist's Promethean touch) distinctive individuals.

Besides the political theme and the 'nature' *versus* 'art' theme there is also the romantic story of Ferdinand and Miranda. Romeo and Juliet were the great young lovers of Shakespeare's 'nonage'; there, the sins of the fathers were tragically — but undeservingly — visited upon the children. Ferdinand and Miranda were the creation of Shakespeare's last years at the theatre, and although they follow close upon Florizel and Perdita they still claim an independent and abiding place in our affections. These lovers are pure youth and goodness — fresh as spring and fair as dawn — and fully deserve each other. In III. i the log-bearing captive Prince and the Princess who has seen no eligible young man before find themselves in love, and Shakespeare never wrote more enchanting dramatic poetry:

*Miranda.* Alas, now; pray you.  
 Work not so hard . . .  
 If you'll sit down,  
 I'll bear your logs the while; pray give me that;  
 I'll carry it to the pile.

- Ferdinand.* No, precious creature :  
 I had rather crack my sinews, break my back,  
 Than you should such dishonour undergo,  
 While I sit lazy by . . .  
*Admir'd Miranda !*  
 Indeed the top of admiration . . . O you,  
 So perfect and so peerless, are created  
 Of every creature's best !
- Miranda.* I do not know  
 One of my sex ; no woman's face remember,  
 Save, from my glass, mine own ; nor have I seen  
 More that I may call men than you, good friend,  
 And my dear father . . . I would not wish  
 Any companion in the world but you ;  
 Nor can imagination form a shape,  
 Besides yourself, to like of . . .
- Ferdinand.* My mistress, dearest ;  
 And I thus humble ever.
- Miranda.* My husband, then ?
- Ferdinand.* Ay, with a heart as willing  
 As bondage e'er of freedom. Here's my hand.
- Miranda.* And mine, with my heart in't.

The sins of the fathers are *not* to be visited on these children ;  
 they are to be permitted to be happy, and they are to bring  
 happiness to their fathers.

The masque and Prospero's magnificent speech (IV. i. 148) —

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
 As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
 Are melted into air, into thin air ;  
 And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
 The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
 And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
 Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
 As dreams are made on ; and our little life  
 Is rounded with a sleep —

have justifiably provoked much comment. Play within the play :  
 veils behind veils : person, actor, spirit, deity : — but, which is  
 which ? which is the Appearance and which is the Reality ?  
 What is Prospero — or Shakespeare — driving at ? According  
 to S. L. Bethell,

"this passage, far from proclaiming the agnosticism of a world-weary artist, clearly asserts, at the culmination of a life-long and unique poetic experience, the existence of an eternal order behind the relatively trivial and impermanent phenomenal world, as the 'real' world exists in comparative stability behind the shadow world of the theatre".<sup>68</sup>

Actually, in the incandescent dramatic poetry of *The Tempest* divers planes of reality (life, drama, dream) intersect, the triple allegories (sin and redemption, nature and nurture, becoming and being) coalesce, and the triple 'orders' (nature, art, Grace) merge into the parable of flawed reality striving towards Ideal Possibility. *The Tempest* was practically Shakespeare's last play, and it is also the last chapter in his "life of allegory", the last span in the bridge he built across the river of fire that is the river of life. And to this bridge — 'From Here to Eternity' — to this life of allegory turned into imperishable poetry we can certainly give the name of 'Divine Comedy'.

<sup>68</sup> *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (1948), p. 41. Cf. also St. John Chrysostom (quoted in Anne Richter's *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*):

"Life is as it were a play and a dream, for as on the stage when the curtain is closed the shifting shadows are dissolved, and as with the flashing light dreams are dispelled, so in the coming consummation all things will be dissolved and will vanish away".

The shadow-play of Appearance will disappear, and ineffable Reality take its place.

CORRECTION: Footnote 22 on p. 563 should read — *Shakespeare Survey* 11, p. 68.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE DRAMATIC ARTIST

#### I

#### THE 'MAN' AND HIS 'WORK': 'NATURE' AND 'ART'

By the time the Puritans closed the theatres in 1642, some 670 plays had been printed, out of which 623 are still available for examination. The number 670, however, is by no means anywhere near the number of plays actually written during the 60 or 70 years preceding the closing of the theatres. Of Aeschylus' 90 plays and Sophocles' 120, only 7 of each have survived; but Euripides seems to have fared better, for 18 out of his 80-90 plays have come down to us. Of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, only Ben Jonson took particular care to collect and publish his 'Works' in his life-time. Do the 37 plays now generally attributed to Shakespeare comprise his entire work — or must we reconcile ourselves to the idea that some are forever lost? Out of the 243 plays by different dramatists mentioned by Philip Henslowe in his *Diary*, only 37 in all seem to have been actually printed, which would mean that the vast majority — 87 per cent in fact — are now totally lost to us. If the casualty rate was really as high as 87 per cent, it would not be unreasonable to make the surmise that, perhaps, as many as 5,000 plays or more were written prior to 1642. In Shakespeare's own life-time 20 of his plays (including *Pericles*) had been issued in Quarto editions; and before the closing of the theatres *F<sub>1</sub>*, *F<sub>2</sub>* and *F<sub>3</sub>* had all come out. The devotion and industry that Heminge and Condell brought into the production of the First Folio practically rule out the possibility of many (or indeed any) of Shakespeare's complete plays having been permitted to be



covered by oblivion. Although we do not have many records of Shakespeare's contemporary fame commensurate with the glory that now surrounds his name, this single circumstance that his plays have after all defied the high mortality rate of the times offers decisive proof of the large space they held in men's minds and bosoms. The plays have 'endured', and that is the main thing.

Shakespeare was a dramatist, a poet, and a player ; and it was the poet who mediated between the other two, becoming thereby the 'paraetele' that leads the creator and the interpreter in a dance of trinitarian unity. Ibsen's dramatic output averaged one play every two years, but Shakespeare managed to provide his Company at the almost uniform rate of two plays every year. "It was not easy, even for Shakespeare", says Raleigh, "to supply his best work, freshly wrought from fresh material, at the rate of two plays a year. For certain marvellous years he almost did it ; and, as likely as not, the effort killed him",<sup>1</sup> — as the effort at even a lesser tempo drove the great Norwegian too to a softening of the brain and a gradual fading away. Shakespeare was able to pack so much achievement into little more than a couple of decades partly because his work as a player, while it made calls on his strength, also gave him that inside knowledge of the theatres that came most handy to him as a dramatist ; and partly because he was shrewd enough not to fritter away his energies in pamphlets, prose romances, lampoons or even letter-writing. Besides, he seems to have avoided in his dealings with his fellow-men all displays of fret or bad temper, and all involvement in unseemly controversy. He was the 'gentle Shakespeare', 'my Shakespeare', he was the dear-loved, he was 'of a free and open nature', and he wore a 'daily beauty in his life' ; he was known to be affable, amiable, modest, brave (meaning 'gallant'), friendly, civil, sociable, tolerant, sweet. Immediately after Greene's outburst in 1592, Henry Chettle who had seen the *Groatsworth of Wit* through the press came out with a handsome apology :

" . . . I am as sorry as if the originat fault had beene my fault, because my selfe have seene his demeanor no lesse civill than he exelent in the qualitie he professes : Besides, divers of worship have reported his up-

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 114. Ivor Brown's *How Shakespeare Spent the Day* (1963) reveals a good deal about Shakespeare's daily working life.

rightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his Art".

Shakespeare was obviously capable of sustained work, and he certainly had an eye to business; these, coupled with his careful husbandry, led to a tidy competence on his retirement. Bradley thinks that Shakespeare (like Goethe) disliked dogs; and he certainly disliked Puritans and fanatics — though even this dislike expressed itself in terms of humour, not malice. "The rain of Shakespeare's genius", says F. P. Wilson, "falls alike upon the just and the unjust, upon the clever and the silly".<sup>2</sup> He was not the sort of man who would see only one side of a 'case', or who would express himself loudly, violently, or unbecomingly. He figured in certain legal transactions, no doubt, but even these do not seriously damage the general picture of the gentle hard-working player and dramatist who strove by legitimate means to 'make good' in London and effect a return to Stratford with a place ('New Place') to live in and a modest sufficiency to enjoy in his last years and bequeath to his family. In the London of his day when disturbances were not uncommon on the South Bank, Shakespeare himself never seems to have taken the initiative in a brawl or any untoward proceeding. We have also John Aubrey's interesting testimony, although it comes at second or third hand:

"the more to be admired (quia) he was not a company keeper lived in Shoreditch, wouldnt be debauched, & if invited to writ; he was in paine".

While Shakespeare was 'good company' at the Mermaid and elsewhere being genial and nimble-witted, he nevertheless seems to have wisely kept clear of exhausting parties and outings — he wouldn't be 'debauched', he sent his 'regrets' and excused himself! Not that Shakespeare was a saint, or particularly saintly in his ways: he was but a man among men, and he knew the passions that move average humanity, and he could also imaginatively visualise the passions that rock exceptional humanity. But take his whole life, and there is seen to be a rhythm in its progress from Stratford to London, — and back to Stratford at last, the revels over, the exertions ended, the passions

<sup>2</sup> *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare* (1954), p. 120.

spent. The wheel was come full circle indeed ; he was in beloved Stratford again. Like Hazlitt he too could have said, as he died, "I've lived a happy life". The happiness of course lay, not in never having known sorrow and defeat, but in the felt power to master and beyond them. In spite of everything, his had been a *happy* life — and an incalculable *blessing* to the unborn generations.

If Shakespeare the 'man' disarmed his contemporaries by his geniality and a temper that induced immediate trust ("children, we feel sure, did not stop their talk when he came near them", says Raleigh<sup>3</sup>), his 'work' was more or less taken for granted. He was the kind of person from whom such plays were only to be expected. He was not a hard-headed scholar (like Jonson), yet he was wisely learned, for he could make the most of his 'small Latin and less Greek'. Although not a naturalist, he knew the flora and fauna of his native Warwickshire well enough to make the best possible poetic use of this munificent store of first-hand impressions. Life at Stratford and in London, life at the theatre and in noblemen's houses, life at the Court and in the provinces (which Shakespeare toured with his Company), all this enriched his memory ; and when he wrote, he was able to draw freely upon his studies, conversation, observation, and the delectable treasure-house of memory, reverie, fancy and fantasy. It may almost be said that the man writ himself out in his 'work' ; and without equating him with any of his characters we can still see in the 'Complete Works' the man that was of imagination all compact, — the man who glorified love and married chastity though he was no Puritan, — the man who knew the value of 'order' and 'legitimacy' though he hated tyranny and the mere 'letter' of the law, — the man whose idea of justice included its transcendence through forgiveness, — the man whose large and most comprehensive soul could view with humility the short and simple annals of the poor and judge with charity fools like Dogberry and rogues like Autolycus, — the man who could paint a usurer like Shylock, a usurper like Bolingbroke, a Malvolio so sick of self-love and a Caliban so ugly and venomous (though with subtle touches of pity and love), — the man who could indeed (albeit without any oblique moral commitment) present even a Macbeth in terribly vivid and almost sympathetic terms,

<sup>3</sup> *Shakespeare*, p. 14.

— the man who cared more for life than for dogma and more for humane fellowship than for humourless homily, — and, finally, the man who was robustly this-worldly yet also conscious of the powers, some beneficent some evil, that are in co-adunition with this world, and conscious above all (and in spite of everything) of the Divinity — the grace of Grace — that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we may! Commenting on the mystery of Shakespeare's relation to his work, Allardyce Nicoll writes :

"Many years ago the German scholar Tieck, searching for an explanation of Shakespeare's genius, hit on a peculiarly fortunate theological simile. He said that, just as God in relation to human beings is both immanent and transcendent, so the poet is immanent and transcendent in relation to the characters of his imagination. We sense Shakespeare's presence beyond the actions of his plays, a god-like presence often shrouded in a mystery beyond the reach of reason and nevertheless potently appreciated; and at the same time we feel his vitality and strength identified with, and expressing itself through, the individual characters".<sup>4</sup>

Again, the Poet Laureate has affirmed :

"We know now that Shakespeare, if he had not a deep religious sense, had a righteous mind. The beauty of the right course, the evil of the wrong course, is clear in each play. From the very first, there is an insistence upon truth, of every kind, as the life in human affairs, the enduring thing".<sup>5</sup>

The 'man' Shakespeare, his 'inner life' — his mind, his soul, his 'glassy essence' — is thus unmistakably revealed in his 'work', even though (to repeat the caution) we shouldn't see him as any one of his heroes in particular: not Hamlet, not Antony, and not even Prospero.

The question still remains: How did the 'man' create the 'work'? Heminge and Condell paid this tribute to the felicitous ease with which Shakespeare wrote :

"Who, as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he vttered with that easinesse, that wee haue searee receiued from him a blot in his papers".

<sup>4</sup> *Shakespeare* (1952), p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> John Masefield, *William Shakespeare* (1954), p. 5.

(And Ben Jonson is said to have retorted, "Would he had blotted a thousand!") Dryden likewise said in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* that "all the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily". Addison classed Shakespeare among the "great natural Genius's . . . who by the mere Strength of natural Parts, and without any Assistance of Art or Learning, have produced Works that were the Delight of their own Times and the Wonder of Posterity". Hazlitt too said that Shakespeare excelled "as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term)". And Carlyle said in his lecture on 'The Hero as Poet':

"Novalis beautifully remarks of him, that those Dramas of his are Products of Nature too, deep as Nature herself . . . Shakespeare's Art is not Artifice; the noblest worth of it is not there by plan or precontrivance. It grows up from the depths of Nature, through this noble sincere soul, who is a voice of Nature".

On the other hand, it was the same Ben Jonson who told Drummond that "Shakespeare wanted art" that also paid this formal tribute to his art in the verses he prefixed to the First Folio:

Yet must I not give Nature all: Thy Art,  
My gentle *Shakespeare*, must enjoy a part.  
For though the *Poets* matter, Nature be.  
His Art doth give the fashion.

Maurice Morgann, in the course of his magnificently rhapsodical appreciation of Falstaff (1777), boldly said:

"Shakespeare is in truth, an author whose mimic creation agrees in general so perfectly with that of nature, that it is not only wonderful in the great, but opens another scene of amazement to the discoveries of the microscope".<sup>6</sup>

There had been already attempts at the detailed explication of some of Shakespeare's plays and characters, like Joseph Warton's on *The Tempest* and Thomas Whately's on 'Richard III and Macbeth'; and, in the 19th century, De Quincey's 'On the Knocking of the Gate in *Macbeth*' (1823) carried microscopic

<sup>6</sup>This and the earlier extracts are taken from *Shakespeare Criticism: A Selection*, with an Introduction by D. Nichol Smith (1916). The book also includes the contributions by Warton, Whately and De Quincey referred to immediately afterwards.

scrutiny and exegesis to inspiring heights, while a book like R. G. Moulton's *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (1885) tried to bring an Euclidean approach to some of the plays of Shakespeare. But the notion that Shakespeare was more of a 'natural genius' than a conscious artist persisted, and apparently the ghost is not to be still easily exorcised away.

In our own century, the ignorance or minimisation of Shakespeare as a dramatic artist has taken new forms. He was but a professional actor and playwright; his company presented on an average 15 plays a year; he was an interested 'sharer' too, almost a speculator; and he wrote always with an eye on the box-office. He was governed, besides, by the absurd conventions of the Elizabethan stage, and he had to keep his largely unlettered audiences in good humour by descending to *their* level. Under such conditions, how could he have possibly thought in terms of art? In his now famous (perhaps also notorious) essay on 'The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama' (1907), the late Robert Bridges remarked that

"Shakespeare should not be put into the hands of the young without the warning that the foolish things in his plays were written to please the foolish, the filthy for the filthy, and the brutal for the brutal; and that, if out of veneration for his genius we are led to admire or even tolerate such things, we may be thereby not conforming ourselves to him, but only degrading ourselves to the level of his audience, and learning contamination from those wretched beings who can never be forgiven their share in preventing the greatest poet and dramatist of the world from being the best artist".

Bridges gave what he thought even-handed justice: praising, yet condemning, Shakespeare in one breath—and blaming his defects on his audience. The Elizabethan age—with its 'baroque' traditions, its predilection for the fantastical, the bizarre, the out of the ordinary—also further circumscribed, or rather vulgarised, Shakespeare's art. The newer critics—E. E. Stoll of Minnesota and Levin Schucking of Breslau<sup>7</sup>—gave (like Bridges) a dominant role to Shakespeare's 'audience', its supposed limitations and prejudices, and sought thereby to render

<sup>7</sup> Cf. E. E. Stoll's *Shakespeare Studies* (1927) and *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare* (1933) and Levin Schucking's *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays* (1922), *The Meaning of 'Hamlet'* (1937), and 'The Baroque Character of the Elizabethan Tragic Hero' (1938).

nugatory the 19th century psychological interpretations culminating in Bradley's classic, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904). Inconsistencies in characterisation, loose ends in the plot, ramshackle 'construction', and crudities in motivation were just what they seemed to be; dramatic illusion in the theatre covered many artistic sins of omission and commission, but there was no use explaining them away laboriously in terms of super-subtle psychology in the Morgann-Coleridge-Bradley tradition! Shakespeare was an outstanding genius, no doubt, but he was in bondage to a primitive or naive technique, and he wrote on primitive themes for a primitive audience. Othello's career struck Stoll as a heap of contradictions; Cleopatra seemed to Schucking two different women uneasily yoked together; and *Hamlet* itself came under fire. In his book, *The Problem of Hamlet* (1919), J. M. Robertson remarked that "the construction is incoherent, and the hero perforce an enigma, the snare of idolatrous criticism", while T. S. Eliot portentously affirmed (in *The Sacred Wood*, 1920) that *Hamlet*, "so far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece, . . . is most certainly an artistic failure".

While these latter-day 'realists' have doubtless helped to sweep away some of the cobwebs of discursive fantasy spun out in the name of 'psychological' interpretation, they have also gone wrong by trying to turn their animadversions into a rigid orthodoxy. If the psychologists are the critical idealists, the realists are the critical materialists; and one negation could be as one-sided as the other. It is the old issue between Appearance and Reality in yet another tantalising form. The race, the milieu, the moment — Taine's determinants of literature — were the same for Shakespeare as for Greene or Ford; all three (and many others) wrote for apparently the same type of audience; and yet what a difference between, say, *James IV* and *As You Like It* or between *Othello* and *Love's Sacrifice*? And what do we, after all, know of Shakespeare's 'audience'? The hundreds that gathered at the Globe evening after evening were not all of a piece. There were levels of consciousness, there were men receptive to intimations from more than one plane, and there were also — there must have been — the ideal *sahridayas* who could tune in to the right wave-length and lose themselves in the splendorous symphony. In his Academy Lecture (1930), Lancelles Abercrombie said:

"... an artist can quite well make a business of his art. Economic pressure and the pressure of an artistic inspiration need not be alternatives; a man may work under both kinds of pressure at once. Michael Angelo did; Titian did; why not Shakespeare?"<sup>8</sup>

Of Shakespeare's relation to his audience, again, Abercrombie made this pertinent point:

"What Elizabethan audiences chiefly delighted to see, and what an Elizabethan dramatist had to give them (and, being himself an Elizabethan, delighted to give them) was a spectacle of the *variety* of life... This demand was the governing condition under which Shakespeare worked... it exactly suited Shakespeare — nay, it was as much the inspiration as the condition of his work."<sup>9</sup>

Given the conditions — the need to make money as an actor-sharer-playwright, the need to conform broadly to the Elizabethan dramatic tradition, and the need to 'cater' to the audience that collected at playhouses like the Globe — Shakespeare could still turn them to his own advantage, and the poet and the man of feeling and imagination could make his art transcend the mere economic, professional, and conventional pressures. And that is exactly what happened. Entering a caveat against those who invoke the bogey of the limitations of the Elizabethan theatre, Dover Wilson says that literary critics are apt to "run great risks in passing judgements on Shakespeare which involve questions of theatrical values".<sup>10</sup> Always an ounce of practical knowledge is better than a ton of theorising in a vacuum! The spacious days of Elizabeth are gone, never to return; the Globe itself is no more than a ghostly memory; but Shakespeare's plays continue to be played and enjoyed all over the world. As regards the alleged faults of dramatic inconsistency and unconvincing motivation, C. H. Herford wrote in 1923:

"Modern psychology, by its disclosure of the phenomena of dual and multiple personality, has eased the path of those who find real inconsistency in any of Shakespeare's characters; their inconsistency need not detract from their psychological truth".<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Aspects of Shakespeare*, edited by J. W. Mackail (1933), p. 231.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>11</sup> *A Sketch of Recent Shakespearean Investigation: 1893-1923* (1923), p. 48.



More recently, S. L. Bethell in his *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (1944) has applied the principle of multi-consciousness to clear up the ambiguities posed by realists like Stoll and Schlucking, while J. I. M. Stewart — in his *Character and Motive in Shakespeare* (1949) — has sought the help of the new Freudian psychology for the same purpose.

In our own time the tendency is to explore Polixenes' view that 'art' can season 'nature', and this seasoning too is 'nature', "great creating nature". 'Becoming' is a fact of existence, and so is 'being'; 'nature' receiving the impress of 'art' evolves and careers towards future horizons — and each milestone has its own autonomy, its own perfect seal of 'nature'. Critical awareness is now apt to concentrate on divers aspects of Shakespeare's 'art' — not the characterisation alone (which was Bradley's forte) but also the language and the poetry, the plotting and the construction. Claiming that "we have left Bradley fairly behind", F. R. Leavis adds by way of caution :

"We are aware of subtle varieties of possibility under the head of convention, and we know we must keep a vigilant eye open for the development of theme by imagery and symbolism, and for the bearing of all these on the way we are to take character, action and plot. Shakespeare's methods are so subtle, flexible and varied that we must be on our guard against approaching any play with inappropriate misconceptions as to what we have in front of us".<sup>12</sup>

Another (a more sceptical) view of the new Shakespeare criticism has been expressed by John F. Danby :

"Criticism, after Coleridge, was only interested in 'character'. This tended to disintegrate the Chronicle statement. Atomisation since Bradley has gone even further. Shakespeare's story has been broken down into separate and jarring bits: 'themes', 'world-views', 'ideas', even 'images'. The co-ordinating principle of story (the most primitively obvious one) has been overlooked".<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, preoccupation with 'pattern' or 'structure' has tended to ignore the life, the energy of movement, in the play; and preoccupation with 'vision' and 'symbolic overtones' has obscured the sheer sensory link, the physical immediacy of the persons in the play, their writhings, longings, despairs, hopes. The co-

<sup>12</sup> *The Common Pursuit* (Peregrine Edition), p. 174.

<sup>13</sup> *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, pp. 202-3.

ordinating principle of 'story', the dance of the play's life, and our own integral experience of both—all are important. The Ground : creative Energy : Bliss of achieved identity—*sat-chit-ananda*—these together constitute the one inescapable reality of Shakespeare's dramatic art and our dynamic response to it.

It is anyhow clear now that nothing is too readily to be taken for granted, or too cavalierly dismissed as being of no consequence. The Shakespearian 'debate' goes on without intermission, and the interpellations and supplementaries keep the proceedings lively. There's quite possibly more in the meanest character or episode than meets the eye. In the course of his new book on *Hamlet* (1961), Weston Babcock says with the gravediggers' "nonsense" in his mind :

"It is never safe to take Shakespeare's nonsense for what it may, at first hearing or reading, seem to be. By force of his supremely associative mind, Shakespeare was incapable writing what did not have connection somehow with the implications of the play".

The Elizabethan age, the climate of thought and opinion and prejudice, the contemporary dramatic and theatrical tradition, all had much to do with the making of Shakespeare's plays ; but the maker was still Shakespeare. His 'art' too was like 'nature'— "great creating nature"—like Spring bursting out of Winter ; but the 'art' had its own inner causation in the very law of his being. The framework of the plot, the richness and variety of the action and characterisation, the living arteries of the language, the sustaining soul's light of the unifying Vision, *all* are important, and Shakespeare's art held sovereignty over them all.

Twentieth century scholarship and criticism, in its anxiety to explore infinite space in the Shakespeare continuum or to bombard the Shakespeare nucleus, is no doubt becoming more and more tantalising. There are Hegelians, Marxists, Euclidean, Freudians, Vedantins, Semanticists, and Statisticians, each with their own dogmas, techniques, and *paribhashas*. Discussing in *Shakespeare Survey 2* the role of scientific rationalism in Shakespeare criticism, Hardin Craig indicated the three degrees of scientific investigability—corresponding to the three widening concentric spheres of the humanities, the social sciences, and the physical sciences—and categorised (after Bacon) the errors and vanities of scholarship and criticism, and exhorted Shakespearians

to seize the essentials and try to see the truth of the matter in all its breadth and thoroughness. We may offer what hypotheses we may, but we should not forget that "Shakespeare's own meaning is the greatest of meanings and is the one the world needs". On the other hand, as Lascelles Abercrombie pointed out decades ago, "the endlessness of Shakespeare criticism is like the endlessness of Einstein's space — you keep on going round and round". But however far the centrifugalists (the background-explorers: the 'gods') may seem to go, however futile the centripetalists (the bombardiers of the nucleus of the unique Shakespeare: the 'men') may appear when they seek to pluck the heart of the mystery, and however exasperatingly the circumambulationists (the critics of plot, theme, language, versification, imagery: the 'demons') may keep going round and round, there is also the natural balance and interaction between the three movements — the outward, the inward, the circular: the centrifugalists cultivating restraint (*damyata!*), the centripetalists bringing insight and understanding to their task (*datta!*), the circumambulationists learning to integrate their findings to the central mystery and the central truth (*dayadhvam!*) — thereby forging the unity of the circumambient world with Shakespeare, and Shakespeare with the world of the poems and the plays. Shakespeare lived a double life: a life *without*, and a life *within*. There was on one side the seemingly prosaic life of the 'Man from Stratford'; and, on the other, there was the Shakespeare whose mind was avid for experience, whose senses stretched out to register impressions of the world of Man, Nature and God, whose imagination glanced from purgatorial earth to worse hell and from hell to ultimate heaven, and *this* Shakespeare lived a thousand different lives, scoured the ages and continents for meeting the demands of his soul; and what he gathered — the recordings of his inner life (his 'life of allegory'), the lessons (part poison, part nectar) of past personal and human history — he put into the poems and the plays, making them the divers cantos of the developing and fulfilling epic of his allegorical omnixistential life. The outward movement of insatiable curiosity and appetite for imaginative experience was constantly balanced by the inward movement of seeking and losing and finding himself again and again. And so every play became a step forward in the evolution of the 'man' Shakespeare and the evolution of

the transforming vitalising power that was his dramatic art. Thus the rhythm of Shakespeare's outer and inner experience made the music of his life and art. The man and his work, his world and his art, formed a full circle, — and from its centre still radiates

Beauty, truth, rarity,  
Grace in all simplicity.

## II

### CONSTRUCTION AND CHARACTERISATION

A work of art is a living thing, or it is nothing. One can anatomise a corpse, but not something that is alive, for this would be murder! A modern X-ray photograph of the bone-structure has its uses, but the living man is more than the photograph. And the living man is also a growing man. As a man grows his bone stiffens, the tissues change, and the mind grows in awareness and understanding. The hidden bone-structure, the visible human form (with its draperies), the chemical, electrical and psychic systems working in close collaboration, the mind, the heart, the soul — these together constitute the entity we call a living human being. Men with various physical handicaps remain men so long as 'life' is not extinct in them — so long as there is a 'soul' they can call their own. The soul is, indeed, everything, yet the paradox is that it needs a material tenement for its everyday manifestation. With a play like Shakespeare's, too, the ultimate criterion is this *elan*, this soul-quality. *The Tempest* is a far more finished work of art than *Pericles*, but *Miranda* is not more real or alive than *Marina*. The play *Pericles* is like a cripple going on crutches who is still a man; to pursue the simile, *Cymbeline* is an uneasy unwieldy man, *King Lear* a feverishly disturbed man, *Hamlet* an agonisingly inquisitorial man, and *Richard II* an attractive ineffectual man — yet are they 'creatures all', visibly and vividly alive. There are, of course, degrees of vitality and consciousness, but any amount of hectic 'action' is no substitute for the 'soul quality'. A machine is 'active' in terms of an externally imposed law. A good deal of mechanical human activity is also of this kind, mere sound and fury that signify nothing. It is when the mind is committed, the heart is engaged,

the soul is deeply stirred, that action and even inaction acquire significance in human terms : become 'dramatic', in fact. The scene is chosen : the background is set : the 'characters' enter — what do they do ? what do they speak ? what do they think ? what do they feel ? what do they experience in the unplumbed depths of the soul ? Our attention is shifted more and more from the outside to the inside, from the visible to the invisible, from the known to the unknown. Great drama is a means to 'knowledge', — a journey of exploration into the countries of the mind, heart and soul. Not every spectator, nor every reader, is equal to this adventure of discovery ; many stop short at the stage of visible action or audible speech — what Wilson Knight would call "the surface crust of plot and character" — but some fare forward, venture further. What is needed is a consciousness that is spontaneously and simultaneously active at divers levels, a consciousness that perhaps operates only half consciously yet also with uncanny percipience. This essentially spiritual adventure involves both world-discovery and self-discovery, for by knowing more and more of human experience we also know more and more about ourselves. "The existence of a work of art", says Abercrombie, "is not material at all, but spiritual. It is a continually creative existence, for it exists by continually creating experience".<sup>14</sup> The three worlds of Dante — Hell, Purgatory, Paradise — are ultimately the worlds *within*, and that is why *The Divine Comedy* is perpetually exciting and perennially rewarding. In Sri Aurobindo's great epic, *Savitri*, the Seer-King Aswapathy is a 'traveller of the worlds' that are seemingly without, while his daughter, Savitri, is a pilgrim in the 'inner countries'; and the reader is left to forge an equation between the occult worlds without and within. Great literature, great drama, by projecting before us the adventures of sundry individuals force us to make them the means of our world-knowledge *and* self-knowledge. As C. S. Lewis remarks,

"... in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do".<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Aspects of Shakespeare*, p. 253.

<sup>15</sup> *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961), p. 141.

Again, with particular reference to the diverse solutions that have been offered about character problems in Shakespeare's plays, J. I. M. Stewart says :

"These people of Shakespeare's really are extraordinary like life, and life is susceptible of many interpretations which do not necessarily invalidate each other . . . When our imagination is kindled we do not think to 'interpret' the characters. We know that the characters are interpreting us".<sup>16</sup>

Talk about 'theme', 'plot', 'poetry', 'image', 'symbol' as much as we may, we must come back to the human potential. Introducing the First Series of his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Harley Granville-Barker said :

"All great drama tends to concentrate upon character ; and, even so, not upon picturing men as they show themselves to the world like figures on a stage — though that is how it must ostensibly show them — but on the hidden man".

More recently Peter Ure has affirmed :

"Shakespeare's plays are great images, of supreme artistic strength and brilliance, amongst the most complex and wonderful artifacts in the history of the world ; but their substance is the human character".<sup>17</sup>

It is of course wrong to take Shakespeare's characters quite out of the context and treat them as though they are 'historical' characters. But it is no less wrong to put pseudo-scientific curbs on the 'liberty of interpreting' Shakespeare. In his 'Recapitulation and Summary' of the characteristics of Shakespeare's dramas, Coleridge made an important point anticipating as it were some of the 'realistic' theses of a century later :

"The characters of the *dramatis personae*, like those of real life, are to be inferred by the reader ; — they are not told to him . . . If you take only what the friends of the character say, you may be deceived, and still more so, if that which his enemies say ; nay, even the character himself sees himself through the medium of his character, and not exactly as he is. Take all together, not omitting a shrewd hint from the clown or the fool, and perhaps your impression will be right . . ."

<sup>16</sup> *More Talking of Shakespeare*, ed. by John Garrett, pp. 122-3.

<sup>17</sup> Inaugural Lecture on 'Shakespeare and the Inward Self of the Tragic Hero' (1961).

This is not 'romantic' theorising, but mere commonsense ; Coleridge would have us 'take all together' before we formulate our view of a character, and if it is the right view it will illumine every segment of the play. But, then, in many of the plays, inconsistencies abound : Hamlet is both enervatingly introspective and quick as lightning ; Othello is the noble Moor as also a man maddened by jealousy ; Cleopatra is a vixenish wanton doubled with a regal Queen. The several bits of evidence do not seem to cohere. Shall we not invent a psychological calculus to integrate the disparate elements ? It is urged, however, that Shakespeare didn't expect his audience to do any such thing. Why shouldn't the playgoer try to piece out the puzzle in the quiet of his house ? Why shouldn't the reader in his study make this attempt at integration ? Again it is urged that Shakespeare didn't bargain for this at all ; his plays were meant to be performed, not read ! "If we wish to know how the author himself wants us to understand his characters", says Schueking, "we must in every case look closely at what they say about themselves, and we ought to take these utterances far more seriously, and see in them a more direct expression of author's intention, than our modern dramatic technique would allow us to do".<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare's *intention* was that we should take at its face value what his characters said or did and not try to look underneath for hidden meanings or motives ! As against this admonition that we should judge by the author's *intentions*, Abererombie exhorts us to judge by *results* :

"You can never be sure what the intentions of an artist were, whereas you always know what he actually did. And if aesthetic criticism is to take over the invaluable things our scientific criticism has gained for us . . . it will simply be to sharpen and intensify our *judgements by results* by our understanding of the means used to obtain them".<sup>19</sup>

Shakespeare wrote for an Elizabethan playhouse, but he moves men's hearts 350 years later in India, in Japan, in Argentine. Shakespeare has projected hundreds of characters into our midst, and many of these we would fain believe we know very intimately indeed. No doubt Shakespeare borrowed the names, lineaments, ideas, and even the words from his predecessors and con-

<sup>18</sup> *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays* (1922), p. 52.

<sup>19</sup> *Aspects of Shakespeare*, pp. 230-1.

temporaries. All the same it was because he touched the characters with the Promethean heat of his own imagination that they came to be newly endowed with life. Likewise the playgoer who is imaginatively alert — the ideal reader who can re-enact in the theatre of his heart the passion and the ecstasy of the several characters — invests the spoken or the printed words with entire significance, and the world that took its birth in the poet's mind is reborn in the *sahridaya's*, and this miracle is repeated over and over again. Discussing the 'Nature of Character in Drama' Una Ellis-Fermor says that "the great dramatists speak, through their characters, from the depths of their own poetic experience to the depths of man's nature".<sup>20</sup> To deny this truth of aesthetic experience is to miss the whole point and purpose of poetic drama.

In Shakespeare's time dramatists were free to base their plays on other existing plays, on history and legend, on Italian *novella* or French romance, or works of travel or reminiscence. Shakespeare was often close to his originals (as in the English and Roman History plays), and reproduced situations and ideas from Holinshed or Plutarch. It is almost certain that Shakespeare worked upon earlier plays for *Measure for Measure*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *King Lear*, and very likely for some few others too. Only in respect of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Tempest*, perhaps, it has not been possible yet to name a clear source or analogue — though even these plays didn't emerge, wonderful and altogether new, like Pallas Athene from Zeus' head. Like the other Elizabethans — even Ben Jonson was no exception — Shakespeare too took the raw material for his plays from the opulent treasure-house of written or oral tradition; but so did Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, — and so did Bhasa, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti. And judged by results, they were wise not to set too much store by mere 'originality' or novelty. In his lecture on Shakespeare (1850), Emerson declared:

"Shakespeare knew that tradition supplies a better fable than any invention can. If he lost any credit of design, he augmented his resources; and, at that day, our petulant demand for originality was not so much pressed . . . A great poet, who appears in illiterate times, absorbs into his sphere all the light which is anywhere radiating. Every intellectual jewel, every flower of sentiment, it is his fine office to bring to his people; and he comes to value his memory equally with his invention".

<sup>20</sup> Paper read at the Conference of Professors of English at Oxford (1950).



Sri Aurobindo, again, puts the following speech into the mouth of Antonio, a character in his unfinished play *The Maid in the Mill*, in defence of the practice of making old stories serve new ends :

if the plot is new,  
The mind engrossed with incidents, omits  
To take the breath of flowers and lingering shade  
In hurrying with the stream. But the plot known,  
It is at leisure and may cull in running  
Those delicate, scarcely-heeded strokes, which lost  
Perfection's disappointed. There art comes in  
To justify genius. Being old besides  
The subject occupies creative labour  
To make old new. The other's but invention,  
A frail thing, though a gracious. He's creator  
Who greatly handles great material,  
Calls order out of the abundant deep,  
Not who invents sweet shadows out of air.<sup>21</sup>

If the Elizabethans sought materials for their dramas with a very wide net sparing neither the depths nor the shallows, neither the open seas nor the deceptive creeks, the best of them — and certainly Shakespeare — knew also how greatly to handle great material and to make the most of what they had gathered. In his excellent essay on 'Shakespeare's Choice of Materials', Hardin Craig aptly says :

". . . it may be said without derogation that from the point of view of plot-construction an Elizabethan play is built like a mosaic with varying skill and ingenuity in putting the parts together . . . Shakespeare's originality seems to have consisted in the selection of great significant patterns, in the discovery of incidents, in unequalled ingenuity in fitting parts together so that they reinforced one another, and in masterly skill in realistic amplification".<sup>22</sup>

Whether Shakespeare stumbled on a basic idea, pattern, or theme while moving among his 'sources', or whether, starting with an idea, he sought ballast for it in history, legend or oral tradition ; whether the task was one of taking out all surplusage from a mass of matter so as to reveal the arc of the inferred 'idea', or of

<sup>21</sup> Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual (1962), p. 62.

<sup>22</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism, 1935-60*, ed. by Anne Ridler (1963), pp. 38, 40.

putting in new matter so as to render the 'idea' vivid with a concord of parts: in either case Shakespeare attempted little originality of the more obvious kind. The 'idea' became the image of a person, often a symbol as well; but the root of all, the base of all, was a human being with a trembling individuality who could hold children in the nursery in a trance of fascination and as a symbol tease out of thought the most pertinacious of philosophical critics. Vision, idea, pattern, plot, story, atmosphere, persons, poetry the Oxygen that they breathe, imagery the 'atoms' of poetry, symbol that crystallises the Vision — and so the dance of creation whirls in cycle after cycle, significance grows wings, and poet, drama and *sahridaya* are bound together in a trinitarian partnership that defies the categories of cold intellectual analysis. We discuss, for the sake of convenience, one or another constituent alone; but even as water is neither Oxygen nor Hydrogen alone, nor yet the two in any uneasy partnership, but only the constituted entity, so too a play like *Antony and Cleopatra* is not the story in Plutarch, nor any 'Terentian' five-act division, nor the imagery inspired by the sea and the Nile, nor yet the contrasted visions of Rome and Egypt, but the marvel of artistic creation that overwhelms us with its witchery as Cleopatra did when she approached Antony from the barge on the river Cydnus. We can talk of the pattern and the *plotting*, the 'logical construct'; filled by human *action*, the second construct; and of the third construct too, *language* that is charged with power and glory.<sup>23</sup> But none of these 'constructs' can by itself make the play. In the course of his masterly 'interpretation' of a speech in *Macbeth* (I. vii. 1-28), Graham Martin utters a word of caution:

" 'Structure', nowadays, is a keyword in Shakespearian criticism. 'Analysis' by 'plot' and 'character' is out. It is 'theme' and 'organisation' that describe modern critical presumptions . . . the static implication of 'structure' must be resisted. A sense of progress is a main part of a sense of drama".<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> I have used a suggestion of John Crowe Ransom's, though made in a different connection. Cf. *Poems and Essays* (Vintage Books, 1955), p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> *Interpretations*, ed. by John Wain (1955). Cf. Helen Gardner "The discovery of a work's centre, the source of its life in all its parts, and response to its total movement — a word I prefer to 'structure', for time is inseparable from our apprehension of works of literature — is . . . the purpose of critical activity" (*The Business of Criticism*, 1959).

Even though Shakespeare might have started with a neat logical frame, while peopling it with men and women caught in a tangle of action and reaction, he must have found that often the frame itself needed extension or adjustment. The mind can control the momentum of artistic creation only upto a point: the unconscious plays its hand, like water bubbling from below, and sudden illumination pours from the 'overhead' levels, like a torrent of rain from above. Whatever the story, no matter how apparently amorphous or crude, Shakespeare — to beg the question! — could generally turn it into superb comedy or moving tragedy, pulsing with life's ardours and intensities, dazzling in colour or thrilling with movement, satisfying in the theatre and also of endless significance thereafter.

Of course the speed with which Shakespeare had to turn out his plays and the need to transmute a leisurely or cumbrous tale into the brisk traffic of 2 or 3 hours, created difficulties and problems which even Shakespeare couldn't always solve. There is, for example, the vexed question of the 'dramatic unities'. Quite obviously, Shakespeare had no use for the rules in the rigid manner they had come to be understood. Johnson has answered for all time the classicists' criticism that Shakespeare wanted 'art' because in his practice he threw overboard the 'unities'. After excluding the history plays which, "being neither tragedies nor comedies", are not subject to the law of the 'unities', Johnson continues:

"In his other works he has well enough preserved the unity of action . . . his plan has commonly what Aristotle requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end; one event is concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence . . . To the unities of time and place he has shewn no regard, and perhaps a nearer view of the principles on which they stand will diminish their value . . . Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation . . . There is no reason why a mind thus wandering in extasy should count the clock, or why an hour should not be a century in that calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field".<sup>25</sup>

A complex plot with its closely affiliated sub-plots, a multitude of characters, an almost limitless extension in space and time make for variety and richness, but they also call for balance and

<sup>25</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism: A Selection*, ed. by D. Nichol Smith, pp. 107ff.

counterpoint, lest complexity end in confusion and orchestration in cacophony. A play of Sophocles', or Racine's, or Ibsen's, proceeds by resolved limitation and achieves terrific concentration in little space. But even a play like *Hamlet*, *King Lear* or *Antony and Cleopatra* doesn't lack unity. Hamlet embraces the whole play as absolutely as an Oedipus does, or a Phedre, or a John Gabriel Borkman. What if, in *Othello*, we move from Venice to Cyprus? or, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, from Egypt to Rome and back to Egypt? The drama is played, not in this or that place except notionally, but in the theatre of the mind and heart of the hero and the heroine. The stage is wherever they are; and time all but stands still before them. When Beatrice jerks out "Kill Claudio!" or Macbeth asks "Is this a dagger which I see before me . . . ?" there is no historic time; we are caught in a stance of timelessness. When Othello tells Gratiano that Desdemona has the act of shame "a thousand times committed" with Cassio, he simply means that once is as unspeakable as many times, and even the very thought is as monstrous as the act. We can no doubt offer plausible reasons for the 'double time' in *Othello* and other plays, as for example Mable Buland does :

"When Shakespeare introduced new elements into a plot which he had taken ready-made, there sometimes came along with these new elements suggestions of time not in accord with the former order of things, which incidental inconsistencies were not observed until after they had established themselves."<sup>26</sup>

Actually, overtaken by the avalanche, does 'where' or 'when' really matter? When the words "This she? No" are wrung from Troilus, or Hamlet expires with the words "The rest is silence", or Cordelia mutters "No cause, no cause!" to her father just reviving into sanity, or Cleopatra achieves the mystic marriage of "Husband, I come", we feel that the world's centre is *here*, that Time must have a stop and that nothing else really matters. Shakespeare was the millionaire who could afford to miss his *naye paisa* and devalued rupees only because, at the crucial or climactic moments, he could always wave his poetic wand and exorcise our prosaic doubts away and impose on us the sovereignty of his imagined world.

<sup>26</sup> *The Presentation of Time in the Elizabethan Drama* (1912), p. 135.

In the preceding chapters on the individual plays, references have been made to Shakespeare's 'sources' and the way in which he transmuted them into dramas vivid with the stir of life and glowing with matchless poetry. In the two historical tetralogies, Shakespcare resorted to dramatic telescoping (or compression of events spread over months and years into a single situation), an adroit incorporation of incidents to leap over long stretches of time, the deployment of the historical material for bringing out telling contrasts (the 'good' Duke Humphrey and the 'bad' Duke of Gloucester), the balancing of historical by imaginary characters and incidents (Prince Hal and Falstaff; the Court and the Boar's Head Tavern), and through the play of irony and parallelism insinuating the working of Nemesis in the epic drama of the dissensions and strife between the descendants of Edward III. In the Comedies, Shakespeare as a rule felt more free to 'invent' situations than in the Tragedies (or Histories). Humour and laughter in Shakespeare, even when the scene is located in Illyria, Verona, Venice, Rome or Bohemia, is purely English with that touch of Franciscan mysticism that makes the fool more wise than the clever and conceited man. Again, 'realistic' scenes, whether in the Vienna of *Measure for Measure* or the Mytilene of *Pericles*, whether it is about the grave-diggers in *Hamlet* or the Porter in *Macbeth*, are also strikingly English in cast — though their universality comes through also. Shakespeare's notion of dramatic unity didn't call for the avoidance of 'comic' scenes in Tragedy or scenes of high seriousness in Comedy. In the Preface to his valuable study, *Shakespearean Comedy*, T. M. Parrott says that, "since a strain of comedy permeates practically all his work, it seems inevitable that a study of Shakespearcan comedy should survey the entire dramatic corpus of Shakespeare", and so he tests all the plays "for the presence and the quality of comic gold". At the heart of Tragedy there could thus be heard a gust of fearless laughter, and such humour, far from being misplaced, is only "a portion of his fidelity to fact, his content in seeing things as they are, his justice, his impartiality".<sup>27</sup> In the Comedies, on the other hand, for all the humour, realism and romance, we are seldom very far from tears. From *The Comedy of Errors* to the very last plays, Shakespearian drama — with its mingling of the 'tragic' and the

<sup>27</sup> Dowden, *Shakspeare: His Mind and Art*, p. 344.

'comic' — is all of a piece. Recognition and reunion are the end-notes of *The Errors* as of the last plays. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* concludes on a note of forgiveness which embraces also 'outlaws', thus anticipating *Cymbeline*. From such similitudes between the earliest and the last plays, it would not be wrong to see Shakespeare's dramatic development as a whole arc of self-sustaining vitality that achieved but greater depth and more inclusive significance with the march of the years. Again, Emile Legouis has pointed out (with, perhaps, just a touch of levity) that the whole evolution of the Shakespearian drama could be explained from what he calls the 'Bacchic point of view'. First came the happy creatures of Shakespeare's fancy (Mercutio, Sir Toby, Falstaff); "all is jovial, frolicsome, jocose in the optimistic period when the cup is only a provocative of wit and fancy". Then came the tragic period, "the days of surfeit and penance"; for men like Claudius, wine is poison, and the means of poisoning others. In the last plays, however, Shakespeare finally recovered; Caliban sees through Stephano the mere drunkard, and "thus is Bacchus contemptuously dismissed in the end by the poet who had first done him homage in the true Renaissance spirit".<sup>28</sup> Like the galloping of the Vedic Aswin (twin horses) that at some point change to swans and wing the sky, Shakespeare's art too changes with the years, adding new dimensions to its comprehension and lifting us at last from familiar earth to dazzling empyrean.

In the Comedies, disguise often plays an important part in giving complication to plot as well as character. Portia in the trial scene is really two persons: what she seems to be, and what she really is. The truth is known only to her, her maid Nerissa (who is disguised herself), — and ourselves! In his recent book, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (1960), Bertrand Evans has studied Shakespeare's "uses of awareness and control" and shown how in the Comedies the audience is generally *more* aware of the truth than the characters. In the 17 Comedies, out of the 297 scenes, in as many as 170 the audience has an advantage over the characters on the stage; and out of 277 named persons or persons with important roles, 151 stand more or less in a condition of exploitable ignorance. Such 'discrepant awareness' is often the result of disguise, and the situations are generally charged with

<sup>28</sup> *Aspects of Shakespeare*, pp. 105-6.

irony. Far from "wanting art", Shakespeare was really "the shrewdest of dramatic engineers". With a prodigal hand he devised his thrilling or amusing situations, yet never wasted a word or introduced a superfluous incident. It is disguise and the privileged position that it gives them that make Julia, Portia, Rosalind, Viola, Imogen, and Duke Vincentio 'control' events, and not merely be rushed headlong by them. Prospero, on the other hand, although he doesn't disguise himself, can make himself invisible; and he can 'control' with his 'magic' Ariel and the elements; and within his little domain and for the required period he is verily a God.

Now even without disguise Appearance may belie Reality. This is the province of Tragedy. Troilus' "This she? No; this is Diomed's Cressida. If beauty have a soul, this is not she" poses the question of Appearance versus Reality in a most agonising form. The *soul* of beauty and the *body* of beauty: can there be divorce between the two? Desdemona is accused falsely though she is not disguised. Lear exclaims that only *unaccommodated* man is the utter truth about man. Lady Macbeth tells her husband that "a little water" will clear them of the deed; "How easy is it then?" But she is wrong, as she will know to her cost. Although our normal reaction is to dismiss drama as shadow-play, yet Macbeth suddenly sees that the tyrant himself is but a poor player strutting his hour on the stage. In *The Tempest*, however, the ending of the revels on the stage is linked up with the ultimate *pralaya* — the *nirvana* of "our little life is rounded with a sleep". There are coils of suggestion — reverberations of *dhwani* — in the plays; and as we look before and after and our awareness grows new dimensions, the problem of Appearance versus Reality almost teases us into 'The rest is Silence' — the Silence that passeth understanding.

"The most trying thing in playwriting is to make a beginning", says George Gordon;<sup>29</sup> and, perhaps, concluding a play is equally difficult. Without the aid of drop-curtains that could be electrically manipulated, Shakespeare had still somehow to bring off his effects on a stage open on three sides to the auditorium. In Ibsen's *Ghosts*, just when Oswald, now mad indeed, blankly asks Mrs. Alving "Mother, give me the sun . . . The sun, the sun", the curtain appropriately falls, and the full horror of the situation is

<sup>29</sup> *Shakespearian Comedy*. p. 75.

allowed to sink into the consciousness of the audience. Shakespeare, on the contrary, was obliged to conclude even the Tragedies, "not with a bang but with a whimper" — though he made what he could of this limitation too by assigning a dignified final speech to an Antony, a Fortinbras, an Edgar, or an Octavius Caesar. With Shakespeare's opening scenes it was not merely a question of effectiveness but also of accomplishing certain essential preliminaries. The theme had to be introduced generally: the characters had to be introduced directly or indirectly; and, above all, the 'atmosphere' — that intangible something which is not seen but whose influence is felt — had to be invoked. The Duke's exit and Angelo's induction are both an accomplished fact at the end of the short opening scene in *Measure for Measure*. The Ghost's ominous appearance takes place in the opening scene in *Hamlet*. In *The Tempest*, the play opens with the supernaturally contrived storm and shipwreck. The bustle, the seamen's native vigour, the reversal of hierarchy in a crisis, the divers mental attitudes of the noblemen in the face of imminent death, all are vividly brought out. In *Pericles* there is a storm too, and in *The Winter's Tale* the ship that takes Perdita to Bohemia is also wrecked by a storm near the coast. The storm signifies both a conclusion and a fresh start in *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, while in *The Tempest* the storm starts the play itself. Commenting on the three storms, George Gordon writes:

"In the two other plays, the storm, however calamitous, is an incident, in *The Tempest*, since the wreck is on a lonely island, the storm is everything. In *Pericles*, therefore, we see it only from the deck; in *The Winter's Tale* only from the land; but in *The Tempest* from both . . . There is no opening scene in Shakespeare comparable to it for suddenness and certainty, unless it be the meeting of the witches in *Macbeth*".<sup>30</sup>

The central Acts of Shakespeare's plays have generally a pivotal significance; the assassination of Caesar at the Capitol, the play within the play in *Hamlet*, the temptation scene in *Othello*, the storm scene in *King Lear*, the banquet scene in *Macbeth*. Sometimes the most important scene occurs in Act IV: the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, the 'coronation in reverse' in *Richard II*, the church scene in *Much Ado*, the reunion of the lovers in the Monument in *Antony and Cleo-*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 76-7.



*patra*. And in plays like *Measure for Measure* and *Cymbeline* (especially the latter)<sup>31</sup> the last Act is devoted to the unravelling of complication on complication till the audience no less than the characters are left gaping in unbelieving wonderment. Shakespeare had evidently no simple unvarying formula for plotting his plays; he was a pragmatist in this respect, and whatever pattern helped him to achieve the desired effect was the best. The 'story' having been chosen (from a single source or from multiple sources), the business of 'plotting' reduced itself to the organisation of the sequence of events in terms of causality and plausibility, and also in consonance with what must be called, even at the risk of misunderstanding, Shakespeare's developing view of the human situation. In the Histories, while the ravages of 'disorder' — with its chain-reactions — are not minimised, the hope that somehow, somehow, the madness must cease and order return, is not withheld; though the dynasties pass in a fury of self-destruction, humanity must somehow endure. In the Comedies, whatever the vagaries of chance and the play of conflicting forces, the resulting situation is the sovereignty of Love, its proved capacity to promote human harmony and happiness over a wide area of experience. In the Problem Plays, intellectual promptings and passionial upsurges are woven into an open-textured fabric; and, seen from one angle, we seem to face the cotton of everyday actuality, and from another the silk of ideal possibility — and we cannot quite make up our minds which is appearance and which is the reality. In the Tragedies implicitly, and in the Romances more explicitly, the dramas are structured so as to point towards a transcendence of defeat and death. In great tragedy, grief and joy interpenetrate so that poison of grief in the fall of man is at last matched (if not exceeded) by the nectar of rejoicing in the Phoenix-like resurrection of the spirit. Shakespeare had to effect a meeting and mating of the ancient Greek and the mediaeval Christian world-views; in George Steiner's words,

"The Elizabethan stage had behind it an edifice of religious and temporal values on whose facade men had their assigned place as in the ranked sculpture of a Gothic portal. The tracery of literal meaning and allegoric inference extended from brute matter to the angelic spheres".<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See Quiller-Couch's lecture on *Cymbeline* in *Shakespeare's Workmanship*.

<sup>32</sup> *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), p. 319.

The antique conception of Tragedy associated with Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides has had to undergo the baptism of rebirth in the river of faith flowing from the double-event of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection :

" . . . the story of mankind was turned into an historical drama. This is the tradition which bequeaths to Shakespeare his basic understanding of man. He seldom expresses it in overt religious language. His plays are not to be read as models of Christian doctrine. Yet it is true that the form of his plays is consistent with the biblical interpretation of man and the universe ".<sup>33</sup>

Although not obtrusively 'religious', the hint of transcendence is what makes the Tragedies so necessary and logical a transition to the Romances with their marriage of actual event and ideal possibility. If Shakespeare's first play was a 'comedy' of Errors, his last, *The Tempest*, is a 'Divine Comedy' that quickly wades through Hell and Purgatory, and brings Paradise itself within one's reach. In Nevill Coghill's words,

"Somehow the Old Adam has been mended by the New, through pardon, and a return to Paradise across the waters made possible. A deep kind of trouble ends in a grave kind of joy".<sup>34</sup>

Read with a 'key' like this, the 37 plays — arranged with some semblance of chronology — would be seen to be the dramatisation of Shakespeare's own Battle of Becoming and the long journey to the Threshold of Being ; in short, Shakespeare's own *Divina Commedia*.

The characters that figure in the plays are so many — about 750 in fact, excluding the nameless ones, and also masses of men like mobs, armies, etc. — that they constitute a world of endless variety. Carlyle called *The Divine Comedy* "Dante's world of Souls"; Shakespeare's plays could likewise be called his "world of Man and Nature". There are here no comic characters of the Jonsonian humour-types ; nor merely satirical characters ; nor yet caricatures (like Mrs. Malaprop). Again, the characters do not simply conform to Morality types or figures in a 'Dance of Death'. Appearances invariably prove deceptive, for just when

<sup>33</sup> Tom F. Driver, *The Sense of History in Greek and Shakespearean Drama* (1960), p. 211.

<sup>34</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism, 1935-1960*, p. 225.

we wish to sum up an Augecheek, a Holofernes, or a Dogberry — or a Falstaff (Riot), an Iago (the Devil), or a Caliban (a salvage) — something or other happens unexpectedly, some human trait reveals itself; Falstaff's heart is fractured and corroborate, Iago's 'diabolical' plans miscarry, and the salvage man is seen to be more of a man than a Stephano or Trineulo, and more worthy of grace than an Antonio or Sebastian. Shakespeare's many Kings are different from one another, the villains are different, the young lovers are different, the fools are different. There are clownish men, and there are 'tragic clowns' (Nevill Coghill's phrase) like the bringer of pigeons in *Titus Andronicus* and the bringer of the wasps in *Antony and Cleopatra*. There are fools and foolish men; there are professional fools (like Feste), there are knaves-cum-fools (like Cloten), there are honest fools like Dogberry, there are roguish fools like Autolycus, and there are tragic fools like Lear's companion.<sup>35</sup> Just as there is no likelihood of our mistaking Aaron for Edmund, or Iago for Iachimo, we shall not mistake Launce for Launcheon Gobbo, nor Dull for Dogberry. In the congress of Shakespeare's young heroines, although all are 'holy, fair, and wise', each has her own unique stance of fascination. None of the inhabitants of this word-made world can escape the mark or stain of 'individuality', for even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, even Goneril and Regan, are in some infallible way subtly differentiated. So much fuss has been made about occasional inconsistency in the characterisation: but suppose a Falstaff — a Hamlet — a Cleopatra — is meant to be 'round' (or 'broad' in the Dostoevskian sense); suppose they are reared up as creatures of infinity, what then? Stavrogin in *The Possessed* is a confessedly Dostoevskian version of Hamlet, and in a character like Dmitri Karamazov the best and worst achieve tantalising co-existence. The chief mark of Shakespearean characters is not mathematical consistency (which is, in fact, far from human if not actually inhuman) but the propensity to surprise convincingly, to plumb the depths, to suggest the infinitudes of the Spirit, to forge the filiations between divers planes of reality. As Una Ellis-Fermor has put it in an article on 'Shakespeare and the Dramatic Mode',

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare's Motley* (1952), and Nevill Coghill's lecture on 'Wags, Clowns and Jesters' included in *More Talking of Shakespeare*, ed. by John Garrett.

" . . . it is precisely in revealing his apprehension of these relations, surface to surface, depth to depth and each to all, that the dramatist discloses the measure at once of his spirit's capacity and of his strength as an artist. Unless he has transcendent capacity of soul, he cannot explore the ultimate depths the knowledge of which will alone give the stamp of verity to his expression . . . For the tragic dramatist, as for all major artists, the cost of this knowledge is no less than a descent into hell ".<sup>36</sup>

Since the period of action in a Shakespearian play may be weeks, months, or even years, there is room for character-development and for the revelation of such change through the 'action'. The church scene in *Much Ado* effects a sudden revolution in the character of Beatrice, and of Benedick as well; or, perhaps, what was latent is suddenly forced into the open. And although generally we can relate character, motive and action, there are occasional unaccountable spurts — Leontes' jealousy, for example — that defy mere reason, and an explanation is possible only in terms of abnormal psychology or with reference to the unpredictability of Evil itself. But better than merely trying to explain or see through Leontes, we should rather invoke the reserves of the human potential in ourselves, and so cultivate an integral response to the total human situation unfolded in the play.

The broad distinction between 'romantic' and 'realistic' characters is valid enough, but it shouldn't be pushed to the point of raising a 'Berlin Wall' between the sheep and the goats. Nick Bottom is but a weaver, but he too is a romantic after a fashion; the Prince of Denmark can talk on terms of equality with guards, players, soldiers, and grave-diggers; and, in their last moments, Iras and Charmian are quite as regal as their mistress, Cleopatra. Shakespeare's ineradicable sympathy for all humanity rules out preference for any one view of life, and his genius touches everybody with animation and universality. One touch of Nature humanises them all — be they princes or bedlam beggars, be they fools, knaves, or criminals, be they plebians, patricians, or king-makers — and the Shakespearian world with its gradations, animosities, prejudices, its strivings, defeats, triumphs, its ardours, agonies, ecstasies, is *one* world, and it is even *our* world. As Ananda Coomaraswamy has observed,

"None has been more distinguished than William Shakespeare, in his profound appreciation of the common humanity of an infinite variety of

<sup>36</sup> *Neophilologus* (Groningen), XXXVII (1952), p. 107.

men. Civilisation must henceforth be human rather than local or national, or it cannot exist".<sup>37</sup>

It is a world where Everyman can feel at home, for this world too is rich with its flora and fauna, here too the sky is alternately ominous and benign; there are occasional supernatural visitants, and there are spurts of supernature as well; and, above all, here is verily Nature's plenty.

In this world packed with people and characterised by plenty, even as the familiar is frequently touched with the colours of Romance, the normal is occasionally upset by the interference of the supernatural and the rational by the eruption of madness. Serious drama, in which motive and action have to be causally related, concerns itself not with mad people but with men and women who think and act and are hence responsible for their actions. They may reason wrongly or perversely, and act mistakenly or with conscious obliquity of purpose; but it is not the same thing as madness operating altogether beyond the pale of reason. The actions of people wholly mad are neither dramatically nor ethically interesting. The characters in Shakespeare's tragedies are *not* mad, only maddened sometimes; of course some *are* mad, but only part of the time. We watch Lear slipping down the inclined plane till at last, throwing off his garments ('Off, you lendings'), he plunges into the darkness; and, again, he returns from darkness to light at the moment he recognises his daughter, Cordelia, just then falling on her knees.<sup>38</sup> Ophelia is mad only in Act IV of *Hamlet*, and we can infer from her broken words and snatches of song *what* has changed the sprightly girl of I. iii into this pathetic creature who still turns all "to favour and to prettiness". It is one of the minor, but significant, points of Shakespeare's constructive skill that Act IV generally provides such 'pathos' — an oasis between the crisis of Act III and the catastrophe of the final Act. Like Ophelia, Lady Macbeth too is 'mad' only in Act IV, and with her also we know *what* has tilted her over the tenuous boundary between light and darkness, and made her feel haunted by the memory of blood and

<sup>37</sup> *The Dance of Shiva* (1952), p. 151. (From an article originally contributed to the *Book of Homage to Shakespeare*, ed. by Israel Gollancz, 1916.)

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Granville-Barker in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies* (1934), p. 77.

tormented by the thought of the wife of the Thane of Fife. She had inhumanly suppressed all promptings of pity and remorse and overplayed in the earlier Acts her talent for ruthlessness, and now it is her innate humanity and pity and sense of Himalayan guilt that defeat her will and insist on self-expression during her somnambulistic orgies. Timon's extreme misanthropy may look like, but is not, madness; he is terribly logical in his own way, and he has but veered from one extremity to its exact opposite. Of Hamlet himself — whether he is mad, or shams madness, or feels maddened, or is only maddening in his behaviour — Shakespeare leaves us in considerable doubt:

Hamlet himself would never have been aught to us, or we  
to Hamlet, were't not for the artificial balance whereby  
Shakespeare so gingerly put his sanity in doubt  
without the while confounding his Reason.<sup>30</sup>

Although in his *Madness in Shakespearian Tragedy* (1929), H. Somerville discovers (as one might expect of a medical specialist) symptoms of madness in most of the chief characters in the tragedies, it is necessary to remember that Shakespeare's is not a clinical interest in madness but an interest only in its psychological and dramatic possibilities — in the genesis, the effects, and the ending of madness. But there is no wholly mad character — mad all the time — in any of the plays.

On the other hand, in Shakespeare's plays (as in life) "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet" come to be strangely clubbed together, and sometimes there is a confusion of the basic categories of 'sane' and 'insane'. Is Dostoevsky's Prince Muishkin — the 'Idiot' — 'mad' or only transcendently wise? Isn't 'mad' Ophelia more eloquent than the girl in full possession of her wits? Madness induces in a Lear, an Ophelia, and even in a Hamlet, something akin to a Kathartic effect, and they are the better in the end for their brief sojourn in the dark. Where cold calculation and razor-edged reason make monsters of daughters and fathers and uncles (and even ourselves), isn't madness the way of wisdom and the means to redemption?

The 'supernatural', again, is introduced by Shakespeare strictly for dramatic purposes. The world of Oberon and Puck is but the naming and the energising of the multifoliate flora of the

<sup>30</sup> Robert Bridges, *The Testament of Beauty*, Book I, ll. 577ff.

woodland and the airy nothings of the imagination, Elizabethan folklore encouraged such fantasies, and Shakespeare made full poetic use of them :

"Shakespeare and his contemporaries bountifully illustrate the superstitious credulity which guided their contemporaries' conduct, moulded many of their social customs, and governed their habitual interpretation of natural phenomena. Superstitions which crystallised into folklore absorbed much that passed for scientific observation even among the educated".<sup>40</sup>

From folklore to ghostlore was the next step, for while the fairies figure in the Comedies, Witches and Ghosts haunt the Tragedies. Apart from the Ghost in *Hamlet*, ghosts appear in some other plays as well — Banquo's in *Macbeth*, Caesar's in *Julius Caesar*, the ghosts of Gloucester's numerous victims in *Richard III*. Were the ghostly appearances and voices but the result of hallucination on the part of the beholders? But, then, why should Bernardo, Marcellus and Horatio also suffer from hallucination? Further, while Hamlet sees the ghost, Gertrude neither sees nor hears anything. Macbeth alone of all those that have come for the banquet sees Banquo seated at the table. Is it, then, for the ghost itself to decide to whom alone it should make itself visible and audible? These questions would seem to admit of a very wide answer indeed. After meeting the Ghost of his father, Hamlet tells Horatio :

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

And Macbeth, after his first encounter with the Witches, says in an 'aside' :

This supernatural soliciting  
Cannot be ill ; cannot be good.

The 'supernatural' is a challenge to reason ; and its interference is marked by ambiguous motivation. Hamlet himself is at one time uncertain whether the spirit he had seen was his father's Ghost or merely an emissary from Hell (II. ii. 594) ; he would therefore have grounds more positive than the Ghost's words !

<sup>40</sup> H. Littledale in 'Folklore and Superstitions' (*Shakespeare's England*, ed. by Walter Raleigh, Vol. I, p. 529).

In *Hamlet* as well as in *Macbeth*, the intrusion by the supernatural is not by itself the determining cause of the tragedy. The Ghost evokes Hamlet's pity and exhorts him to revenge, and comes again later to 'whet' his almost blunted purpose; but it is for Hamlet himself to act or not to act. The 'soliciting' by the Witches has likewise no more than the force of a catalytic agent, for it is always possible for Macbeth — till the final irrevocable moment — to reject the suggestions of the Witches and resist the exhortations of Lady Macbeth; and if he does the deed at last, the responsibility is his alone. In *The Tempest*, the 'supernatural' takes the shape of Ariel and his powers, and perhaps Caliban also, since he is the witch Syeorax's son. Once again, the decisions lie with man: it is Prospero who takes the decisions, and issues the necessary orders. Apart from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is but a fantasy, in the major plays — *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* — the supernatural is either an instrument of incitement to revenge, a sly means of evil solicitation leading to murder, or an obedient and efficient executant — but, always, the primary decisions and actions are men's. Shakespeare's fertility of imagination is, perhaps, nowhere seen so vividly as in the creation of three such supernatural species as the world of Oberon-Titania-Puck, of Hecate and the Witches, and of Ariel and his minions. As M. C. Bradbrook writes,

"In all his supernatural creations, he seems to have created completely new species of creatures, and these of all his characters were most eagerly copied by his contemporaries and immediate successors. The Witches in *Macbeth* . . . set a fashion for witch plays; the spirits of *The Tempest* again set a fashion: Caliban is the prototype of the Witch's Son, a popular figure in Caroline drama . . ."<sup>41</sup>

If 'abnormal' states of mind (madness, sleepwalking) and 'supernatural' agents or visitants (witches, ghosts) are meant to queer the emotional pitch in plays like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, making inroads into the mind of the hero, influencing or infecting his sensibility, sharpening or eroding his moral sense, the 'soliloquy' and to a lesser extent the 'aside' are the means by which

<sup>41</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism, 1935-60*, ed. by Anne Ridler, pp. 381-2. Miss Bradbrook also points out that the fairies in *A Dream* became the prototypes of similar inventions in the work of Drayton, Herrick, and Jonson.



the hero or his 'opposite' is enabled to siphon off his suppressed feelings and give verbal expression to his self-inquisitions, self-lacerations, self-posturings, and self-deceptions. The 'soliloquy', of course, was a popular Elizabethan convention. It had certain obvious dramatic uses: retrospective narration, recapitulation of events from time to time, throwing out hints about the future, indicating the passage of time, discussing motives for a particular course of action, revealing the speaker's character. It is likely enough, as urged by Stoll and Schucking, that in Elizabethan drama 'asides' (which are soliloquies artificially isolated while a dialogue is in progress) and extended soliloquies were the playwrights' normal means of conveying information to the audience, and were hence meant to be accepted without question. Shakespeare took over many conventions — the set speech, the direct address, the aside, the soliloquy, the mingling of romance and realism, the 'morality' and 'interlude' patterns — from the drama of his time, but he was no mere copyist. What W. H. Clemen says as a result of his study of the development of the dramatic speech in Elizabethan tragedy bears particular application to Shakespeare's use of the 'aside' and the 'soliloquy' also:

"At every turn in Shakespeare's early and middle plays we encounter conventional usages, forms of style, literary artifices, and dramatic features which have their origins, and many parallels, in the pre-Shakespearean drama . . . already in his early plays, from *Richard III* onwards, we constantly feel ourselves in the presence of something entirely new and unexpected, something that belongs to him alone, even though he may have borrowed so much of his material, his themes and situations from pre-Shakespearean drama. For what is so often used there as a single detail, a mere matter of technique, a superficial trick of style turns up again in Shakespeare . . . organically related to the meaning of the play as a whole . . . For a long time, indeed right up to the Romantic period, critics were unwilling to credit Shakespeare with this highly finished and conscious artistry, and his finest strokes were put down to 'nature', and not to 'art'; but his supreme artistry will be clear and obvious if his work is approached along the lines we have just indicated."<sup>42</sup>

If figures in Tragedy (a Richard Crookback, a Brutus, a Hamlet, an Iago, an Edmund) make the soliloquy a means of self-revela-

<sup>42</sup> *English Tragedy Before Shakespeare*, translated by T. S. Dorsch (1961), pp. 290-1.

tion, self-laceration, or self-intoxication, if Prince Hal in *1 Henry IV* (I. ii. 188ff) makes the soliloquy a means of lofty self-justification, even comic figures (a Falstaff, a Parolles) find special uses for the soliloquy. Falstaff, for example, can catechise himself on 'honour' or rhapsodise on 'a good sherris-sack' — and both are brilliant exercises in self-approval. Parolles in *All's Well*, being found out at last, makes the soliloquy his means of self-recovery: since he can be Captain no more, simply the *thing* he is will make him live! As Mary Lascelles said in her Academy Lecture (1962), the soliloquy is the "passport" with which Parolles throws himself upon our mercy, and we — on our part — are prepared to recognise even in a Parolles a fellow human being.

The soliloquy, if it is a convention, has a respectable antiquity; in fact, the *ādikavi* Valmiki puts into Hanuman's mouth in the *Sundara Kanda* of the *Ramayana* some of the most amazing soliloquies in world literature. Shakespeare but charged with new significance these conventional aids and made them fulfil functions which his immediate predecessors hadn't as much as dreamt of — for example, enabling the reader (or the audience) to peep into a human crater, or watch the wires and the machinery behind the man's comfortable facade, or follow the ventriloquist's art of giving body and life to misgivings, irritations, impulses, brain-waves, hysterics and exultations. In Shakespeare's hands, the soliloquy becomes a nervous essay in psychological abstraction, or an experiment in dissection as scientific as any conducted in a laboratory; and although the 'soliloquy' and the 'aside' were abandoned on the plea of 'naturalism' by later dramatists, they have now come again — once more on the plea of 'naturalism'! — in the wake of Freud's theories of the unconscious. Joyce's interior monologues in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* constitute one form of this revival; the double-speeches in O'Neill's enormous play, *Strange Interlude*, — the characters speaking aloud in the customary way and at the same time speaking "with a monotonous musing quality", giving formless form to the thoughts that float in the unconscious, — are another example; the audacities in the articulation of inarticulate thoughts and feelings attempted by Samuel Beckett in *Happy Days* and *Play* are yet another. As a psychologist and dramatic technician, Shakespeare seems to have been indeed far in advance of his time. It is not

ly Kyd and Marlowe, Greene and Jonson, that throw light on Shakespeare the dramatic artist, but also Dostoevsky and Joyce, 'Neill and Beckett.

### III

#### 'THE VERBAL ICON'

In the concluding chapter of his now well-known study, *The development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, W. H. Clemen says that a proper estimate of the evolution of Shakespeare's art could only be reached, if *still far more* were to be done to correlate the separate methods of investigation and to show the interdependence of style, diction, imagery, plot, technique of characterisation and the other constituent elements of drama". And T. S. Eliot is affirmed that

"the full meaning of any one of his plays is not in itself alone, but in that play in the order in which it was written, in its relation to all of Shakespeare's other plays, earlier and later: we must know all of Shakespeare's work in order to know any of it. No other dramatist of the time approaches anywhere near to this perfection of pattern, of pattern superficial and profound".<sup>43</sup>

To understand a part one must understand the whole; and to understand the work is also to understand the man, for the poems and the plays are ultimately the expression of a single evolving and developing personality. On the other hand, there are also difficulties with this very valid approach. In the first place, there is the need to agree about the chronology of the plays and poems; and although there is broad agreement now on this question, no two experts would even now be willing to accept the same 'order' as final. Any bold speculation — beginning with Dowden's 90 years ago — on the development of Shakespeare's 'mind and art' has thus always been vitiated by the uncertainty of the very foundations on which the edifice has to be raised. There is, in the second place, the objection (sharply articulated by Lytton Strachey in 1904) against our forging facile correspondences between the character in a drama and the state of mind of the dramatist at the time of composing it. The professional humour-

<sup>43</sup> *Selected Essays*, pp. 193-4.

ist is not necessarily of a sanguine disposition at home ; nor is the 'tragedian' a man afflicted with incurable melancholy in private life. On the other hand, a total divorce between an artist's life and his art has also to be ruled out. Keats said that "Shakespeare led a life of allegory ; his works are the comments on it". Shakespeare the successful playwright was also a 'fore-runner' exemplifying in his own life the symbolism of humanity enacting the drama of innocence passing into experience, experience careering towards death, and death holding out the promise of renewal. A man's work (or art) is, after all, an intimate part of his life — the precious life-blood of the essential man — and hence there is every justification for thinking of Shakespeare's life and art together as a single arc of becoming, so that biography and criticism could merge to achieve an integral view of the man's life, which should also be the allegory of Everyman's life. Without committing ourselves to the 'personal heresy' and avoiding the excesses of the tradition that culminated in Frank Harris's book on the 'Man' Shakespeare, it is still permissible to affirm that there is an active power and personality shaping the poems and plays and linking them into a continuum. Shakespeare borrowed his stories, ideas, and sometimes even his language, from others ; but he also put something of his own — the breadth of his understanding, the temper of his mind, the lucidity of his soul — into his writing. As with the years his understanding deepened, his mind matured, and his soul quickened with the intimations of the Spirit, his writing too revealed new riches and strength, and a new awareness of the spiritual realities behind the exciting or sombre facade of our terrestrial life. The man created, out of materials that lay handy, the totality of the poems and plays ; and these works of art, studied in their chronological order, should in their turn reveal what is great and imperishable in their creator.

Each play of Shakespeare's, being a complex unified whole in several dimensions (space, time, action ; plot, character, language ; vision, theme, imagery), makes its own total impact on us ; but like one eventful day being followed by another, one play follows another, and we are struck by what is similar and what is new, and we also seem to be aware of what is behind and what is beyond what we read yesterday and what we are reading today. Just as we may sense the tread of Time itself behind yesterday, today and tomorrow, we may imagine Shakespeare

himself moving behind *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. It is only analysis and explication that are so difficult, but the experience itself is by no means quite an 'esoteric' one. Unconsciously and simultaneously, we are always engaged in multiple-concentration, and are making a multiple-response to the many-sided impact of a work of art upon us.

Of the constituents of drama, the logical construct — plot — is more amenable to scrutiny and analysis than the human construct made up of the 'dramatis personae'. Discussion of 'characters' is, no doubt, 'easy' enough so long as one doesn't care whether one is side-tracked or not. Like Mariana whose postal address is specific and clear ('Moated Grange', Vienna), the 'address' of Shakespeare's characters as a rule gives little room for ambiguity: they are not to be sought far outside the 'moated grange' of the action and speeches allotted to them by Shakespeare. But whereas 'plot' has a hard (and, at least in Moulton's hands, almost a Geometrical) quality facilitating objective examination, 'character' is a complex and nebulous term. In each play there are several characters, and one is apt to develop irrational sympathies and antipathies, and — what is even more dangerous — to identify oneself with the hero and so substitute one's own address for his. Thus the study of the evolution of Shakespeare's art — where 'art' is practically equated with 'characterisation' — and the fusing of the 'art' with its creator can easily end (unless he is very careful) in the critic only achieving a projection of himself in Shakespearian costumes. A corrective would be to relate the discussion of character-problems to the language of the plays, for Shakespeare's characters — even the greatest among them — are (when all is said) words, words, words, so many significant bundles of words. But, as if in response to the wave of the magician's wand, the 'verbal icon' often leaps into life, and the word is then seen to be the power and the glory, and the truth everlasting.

"Dramatic character, like dramatic plot", says Una Ellis-Fermor, "is an image on the grand scale, and it is the function of imagery to evoke in our minds certain perceptions, realisations, emotions, which are themselves aspects of an underlying reality".<sup>44</sup> When we see or read a play, it is the word that bomb-

<sup>44</sup>Paper read at the Conference of Professors of English at Oxford (1950), and now included in *Shakespeare the Dramatist* (1961).

ards — or invades — or caresses — or steals over us, and starts emotional, intellectual and psychic vibrations; and the words come in waves or in quanta, and often from more than one angle; the vibrations coalesce and fuse and separate and fuse again. It is out of these countless impacts and responses (to which, if we are in the theatre, visual and auditory impressions of like complexity and variety have to be added) that we build up our notions of 'plot' and 'character' and 'theme' and 'vision' and 'idea'. Today, 350 years after Shakespeare left London for good, what was once 'living' speech coming fresh from the forge of everyday life has become nearly (though not quite) as distant or 'foreign' as the Greek of Sophocles or the Sanskrit of Kalidasa. There is a story (probably apocryphal) about the great Tamil poet, Kamban, and his rival, Ottakkoothan. On the latter taking objection to the use of a certain non-existent word ('thumi') by Kamban in his *Ramayana*, the latter arranged for Ottakkoothan to overhear the very word being employed colloquially by one vendor of buttermilk to another. Everyday usage was the final arbiter! In Shakespeare's time, English was the spoken language of 5½ million people and held only the fifth place among the languages of Western Europe. The language was, besides, in a transitionary experimental stage; it had no Grammar, no Dictionary, no universally accepted spelling or pronunciation or accent; new words were added, words out of use were renewed, and current words were connotatively enriched through bold imaginative usage. In his paper on 'Shakespeare's English', read before the society for Pure English in 1926, George Gordon remarked that "the first quality of Elizabethan, and therefore of Shakespearean English, is its power of hospitality, its passion for free experiment, its willingness to use every form of verbal wealth, to try anything".<sup>45</sup> Bringing to the task of writing a flair for linguistic adventure and a feeling for meaning as well as sound, he gaily improvised as he went along. Knowing intimately the dialect of his own Warwickshire and moving freely among the 'common' people of London, keeping his ears open and his sensibilities keen, eavesdropping in town and country, at the Court and on the Bankside, Shakespeare was able — with a pragmatism that paid rich dividends — to load every rift in the received 'literary' language with the 'ore' of the living speech

<sup>45</sup> *Shakespearean Comedy*, p. 134.

of his time. Not only is he credited with probably the largest vocabulary of any English writer; he also introduced, according to L. P. Smith, more new words than "almost all the rest of the English poets put together".<sup>46</sup> Among the new words so introduced by him and since brought into general currency are aerial, accommodation, agile, allurements, antipathy, apostrophe, assassination, auspicious, barricade, catastrophe, critic, cavalier, consonancy, denote, demonstrate, dislocate, dirc, disgraceful, dwindle, dress, emphasis, emulate, extract, fair play, fancy-free, fitful, frugal, fretful, gloomy, gnarl, hurry, horrid, illumine, laughable, leer, lonely, misanthrope, meditate, modest, mutiny, obscene, peak and pine, pedant, prodigious, pell-mell, premeditated, seamy, sportive, submerged, vast, etc. Even with the received words, the semantic proliferation that he started by using them with audacity and imagination has proved a permanent blessing to the language — e.g. cudgel one's brain, sound and fury, one's pound of flesh, to gild refined gold, beggar description, seal one's lips, take arms against a sea of troubles, out-Herod Herod, moving accidents, men in buckram, curled darlings, breathing one's last! Ernest Weekley has remarked that "Shakespeare's contribution to our phraseology is ten times greater than that of any writer to any language in the history of the world", and this in itself is a truly 'prodigious' achievement. On the other hand, as Gordon adds guardedly, "much that lexicography would seem to ascribe to Shakespeare in default of other parentage belongs, no doubt, to the colloquial life he knew so well. But he had a genial share in the business, and his contribution is the more impressive because it has merged so easily in the common fund".<sup>47</sup> In the forge that was his imagination, the ore became pure metal, and with his alchemic touch the brick became marble.

While it is certainly true that Shakespeare's English gives life and soul to present-day English, the passage of 350 years has not been without its effects either. As regards inflections, present-day English is not very different from Shakespeare's. But the intervening centuries have not only pushed many of Shakespeare's words out of use but have also wrought changes in meaning in respect of the others. Where words have gone out of use, a Shakespeare Glossary or an editor's notes come to our ready help.

<sup>46</sup> *The English Language* (1912).

<sup>47</sup> *Shakespearian Comedy*, p. 144.

"The real danger comes", says F. P. Wilson in his discourse on 'Shakespeare and the Diction of Common Life' (1941), "with words to which it is possible to attach the modern meaning and make a sense. But the sense is not Shakespeare's".<sup>48</sup> Or, the words defy even the editor, who can at best only make a guess — perhaps a wrong one. In her recent book, *Explorations in Shakespeare's Language* (1963), Hilda M. Hulme has tracked some 200 words and phrases — among them aroynt, scrip and scrippage, and prenzic gardes — to their Tudor dialect sources, making exhaustive researches in domestic and ecclesiastical manuscripts, and trying to maintain some of the original readings against emendatory ingenuity. While commenting on Shakespeare's use of proverbs, F. P. Wilson says that we are sometimes left in doubt whether Shakespeare is using a proverb or fabricating one. Did he turn contemporary 'sententiae' into crystalline proverbs? But, adds Wilson, "in Shakespeare there are no ill-fitting joints which betray the borrower. He brings everything into a unity".<sup>49</sup> Here, again, researches like Hilda Hulme's — who has 'unearthed' many local proverbs too — should help to dispel lingering doubts. But the process is laborious, and the end is nowhere in sight.

Dependence on popular idiom and colloquial speech was but one clue to the secret of the power of Shakespeare's language. Notwithstanding Ben Jonson's derogation ('small Latin and less Greek'), Shakespeare seems to have known how to use with almost infallible discrimination words of Latin origin alongside of familiar English words, always with an eye to their poetic and dramatic possibilities in terms of cadence and contrapuntal richness of meaning. The first example that occurs to anybody is Macbeth's (II. ii. 62) :

this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine.  
Making the green one red.

<sup>48</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism, 1935-60*, p. 96.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 109. As regards Shakespeare's Bawdy (the subject of a book by Eric Partridge), while admitting that most of what Partridge sees in the plays is actually here, Alfred Harbage adds: "The jokes in their context are primarily jokes and only incidentally sexual ... they suggest that he was a man of humour rather than one inveterately lickerish" (*Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, 1952. pp. 218-9).



The sense is clear : " This<sup>1</sup> my bloody hand will change the colour of the seas themselves from green to red ". ' Incarnadine ' is polysyllabic, forceful, dynamic ; it conveys the sense of violent transformation. But ' red ' is monosyllabic, factual, static ; the change is now an accomplished fact. We feel that the passage gains on account of the simultaneous presence of the long borrowed word and the short native word. Other examples are :

For we are old, and on our quick'st decrees  
Th' inaudible and noiseless fool of Time  
Steals ere we can effect them.

(*All's Well*, V. iii. 40)

All seals and symbols of redeemed sin —

(*Othello*, II. iii. 33)

. . . you shall stifle in your own report,  
And smell of calumny.

(*Measure for Measure*, II. iv. 158)

William Empson gives the above as examples of the ' A and B of C ' type of linguistic form " in which two, often apparently quite different, words are flung together, followed by a word which seems to be intended to qualify both of them ".<sup>50</sup> Why A+B — generally, one Latin and the other native — when either alone would have been enough ? Is it the kind of lazy uncertainty that characterises an expression like ' if and when ' ? Is the speaker's pendulous wavering between the two words (one abstract and intellectual, the other concrete) an indication that the sense he implies is an average — or rather a unity welded out of the two words ? Actually, the pairs of words — inaudible, noiseless ; symbols, seals ; report, smell — juxtapose Latin (or classical) and Anglo-Saxon (or native) elements because, unless the two streams met and mingled (like the Jumna and the Ganges at Prayag) the idea Shakespeare had in mind couldn't be conveyed in all its complexity and fullness. Similar juxtapositions occur when Gertrude speaks of ' pendent boughs ' and ' coronet weeds ' or Antony talks of " a pendent rock, / A forked mountain, or blue promontory " (IV. iv. 4) or Lear cries (III. iv. 33) :

<sup>50</sup> *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (Peregrine Books), p. 60. Other ' A+B of C ' combinations are " the unity and married calm of slates " (*Troilus*), " chaff and ruin of the limes " (*Venice*), " the quick forge and working-house of thought " (*Henry V*), " the gross and scope of my opinion ", " the morn and liquid dew of youth " and " dead vast and middle of the night " (*Hamlet*).

Take *physic, pomp* ;  
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
 That thou mayest shake the *superflux* to them . . .

Every time, the Latin with its strangeness, richness of cadence, and reverberation of meaning highlights the passage. John Crowe Ransom quotes Prospero's speech (IV. i. 148ff) — "Our revels are ended . . . insubstantial pageant faded, / Leave not a rack behind" — and comments :

"The vision disappeared, and so it will be with the world itself, and ourselves. This is said with some pretty doubling between the Vernacular and the Latinity . . . One of the forms that negative capability might take with a poet would be this : to pass slyly back and forth between his two languages, if he is an English poet ; as if he could not be expected to arrive at systematic theology with such a variable instrument".<sup>51</sup>

The problem is not uncommon in India, for here too writers know that the Sanskrit element is valuable (even in Tamil, a Dravidian language) though they know also it shouldn't be allowed to stifle the vernacular. Shakespeare of course made contemporary speech his base — "the conditions of Shakespeare's art as a dramatist did not permit him", says F. P. Wilson, "to stray far from popular idiom"<sup>52</sup> — but he made judicious calls whenever necessary on the reserves of the opulent classical tradition as well. He was this-worldly, but he kept a window open to the infinitudes of the Spirit. He strove for an earthly crown, but since our little life is one day to be rounded with a sleep, the true 'crown of life', although it is to be sought *here*, will be seen when it is found at last to have other than a material cast, for the 'Holy Grail' of the human quest has but a mythic cast with a spiritual core. Life of course has to be accepted, but also beyonded, even as poetry has to effect "the *Nobile volgare eloquenza*" (as Coleridge said echoing Dante). By using Latin, not promiscuously, not pedantically, but creatively and poetically, Shakespeare effected the new heaven and new earth of Latin naturalised in living speech, thus giving a start to English that has made it now a more elastic linguistic medium than any other contemporary language. Is it mere fancy to see in Shakespeare's linguistic practice the expression of his view that it is *here* that

<sup>51</sup> *Poems and Essays* (Vintage Books, 1955). pp. 132, 134.

<sup>52</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism, 1935-60*, p. 92.

the drama of reconciliation and redemption must take place : it is *this* unweeded garden that must be tended back to paradisaal purity and freshness : it is the new Adam that must redeem the old unparadis'd Adam so that the New Jerusalem could be established on earth ?<sup>53</sup>

Shakespeare's flair for using words 'shrewishly' — mixing courtly elegance and 'country matters', Latin sonority and downright bawdy — led him to exploit sheer wordplay in the form of puns and quibbles and riddling speech. Johnson castigated Shakespeare's fondness for this kind of play with words :

"A quibble is to Shakespeare, what luminous vapours are to the traveller ; he follows it at all adventures, it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire . . . A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it".<sup>54</sup>

On our first acquaintance with Shakespeare, he does seem to our ears to be overdoing the trick. Molly Mahood in her perceptive study of the subject (*Shakespeare's Wordplay*, 1957) says that *Love's Labour's Lost* has over 200 puns, *1 and 2 Henry IV* 150 each, *Much Ado* and *All's Well* over 100 each. The total for all the plays and poems is over 3,000, and the average for the plays is 78. Of the characters, the greatest quibbler and punster is of course Hamlet (whose score is 90), and he is followed not far behind by Timon ; and Falstaff does well in each of the three plays in which he figures. Of the villains, Miss Mahood finds Iago, Aaron and Richard III among the inveterate quibblers, but Edmund of *King Lear* seems to have no itch for puns. Of the lovers, the women — Portia, Viola, Rosalind, Beatrice, Juliet, Cleopatra — seem to outshine the men ; and Katherine the shrew with her 16 gets the better of Petruchio with his 15. Of the 'fools', Feste, Touchstone, and the Clown in *All's Well* seem to do well enough. Miss Mahood thinks that increasingly in the later plays (from *Richard II* onwards culminating in *Macbeth*),

<sup>53</sup> Strachey throws out the fanciful suggestion that Shakespeare, perhaps, allegorised in his Sonnets his dual traffic with Latin and English : "one can fancy that the beautiful youth was merely a literary expression for the classical vocabulary, while the dark lady personified the Saxon one. Their relations, naturally enough, were strained, yet intimate . . ." (*Literary Essays*, p. 18).

<sup>54</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism*, ed. by Nichol Smith, p. 106.

more and more of the puns glance in their secondary meanings at the dominant idea of the play as a whole. For example there is the play on 'done' in *Macbeth* (I. vii. 1) :

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly.

'Done' which appears three times here has its ominous reverberation throughout the play. *What's done is done. When all's done, you look but on a stool. What's done cannot be undone.* Is a thing done when it is done — or is there a lot to pay afterwards, for ever and for ever? "But the continuum of time", comments Cleanth Brooks, "cannot be partitioned off; the future is implicit in the present. There is no net strong enough to trammel up the consequence — not even in this world".<sup>55</sup> The compunctious Macbeth and the ruthless Lady Macbeth change 'roles' once the deed is 'done'; they are pursued by the furies of their conscience to contradictory destinations — and while he murders both sleep and compunction, she suffers a total defeat of her reason and will. Once they have *done* the deed, the process of their double *undoing* begins; the usurpation is undone and the murderers are undone. Thus a single word with its quibbling reverberations could reinforce the meaning of a play.

But is it not possible to read in the evolution of wordplay in the poems and plays the clue to the development of Shakespeare's mind in relation to his art? We have seen how Emile Legouis finds a clue in Shakespeare's use of the Bacchic element in the different plays; why not, then, in Shakespeare's wordplay? Without unduly queering the pitch, M. Mahood says that in the early plays Shakespeare shared the contemporary belief that "names could conjure up things".<sup>56</sup> But linguistic scepticism soon came along, and in *Love's Labour's Lost* Shakespeare "boldly questions the truth of words" — *Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile!* The affected Armado and the pedantic Holofernes are but asses who bray in different ways. The 'word' is not power, nor wisdom, nor truth, nor prophecy; the icon is but a piece of trumpery. The 'word' is perhaps a tool, but easier misused than put to good purpose; and hypocrisy

<sup>55</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism, 1935-60*, p. 247.

<sup>56</sup> *Shakespeare's Wordplay*, p. 170.

sits more glibly on one's tongue than veracity. The word 'honest' in *Othello* begins to stink in our nostrils. Of Falstaff's catechism on 'Honour', M. Mahood writes :

"But it is worth noticing that Falstaff does to the word *honour* exactly what the inventors of *Newspeak*, in George Orwell's totalitarian state, did to the word *free*. Because it was mere breath to them, they set to work to rob it of its emotive force to others . . ." <sup>57</sup>

Wordplay could be vulgarised to *newspeak* ; and *newspeak* itself is but the visible and audible form of *newthink*. In the problem plays and the tragedies, the 'word' is further deflated and charged with more corruption still. Words, words — words to cover up murder and incest — words to explain away inaction or wrong action — words that are a refuge for cowardice (as with Claudio in *Measure for Measure*) — words of Pelican daughters — words of 'policy' (in *Coriolanus*). Yet, in the great tragedies, there is already the "hint of a reconciliation between the world of words and the world of facts".<sup>58</sup> The last "word or two" spoken by Othello, the soothing balm of Cordelia's words, and Cleopatra's "Husband, I come" are among the pins of light that enliven the general gloom. This hint is elaborated in the final plays, notably the last two. Because the grace of the 'word' can be abused, because the devil can quote Scripture and Caliban can curse with gusto, does it mean that the 'word' is of no avail at all? The answer to evil is good — always! The answer to Iago is Desdemona; the answer to Goneril and Regan is Cordelia; the answer to the poison of calculated hypocrisy is the nectar of transcendent poetic truth. Even in the last plays, Iachimo, Leontes, and Caliban do their best to accomplish an eclipse of the sunrise of the Word as truth and love and grace; but they are changed at last. And so, M. Mahood concludes, "belief in words is foremost among the lost things which are found again in Shakespeare's final comedies".<sup>59</sup>

Although wordplay often involves the use of imagery, this occurs for more frequently on its own as vital twitches of the thread in the fabric of speech. The writer's problem is to communicate (or at least strive to express) his view or vision of an

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 188.

experience. It may be his own experience, or somebody else's that he has made his own ; and this applies no less to a story or a segment of national history taken over and processed through the dramatist's imagination. A vision, a sequence of events, a group of persons, a pattern of ideas, all flow from the experience ; and the business of ' communication ' has to be done, not through the material medium of marble or bronze or pigment, but the intangible medium of language. The writer has to make a desperate attempt to guide us from the *known* to the *unknown*, from the *familiar* to the *remote*. Abstract ideas and qualities have to be rendered as concrete realities. Connections have to be forged between apparently unlike things, between things that can be seen and those that can only be seen by the inward eye. This is how simile and metaphor spring into existence under the compulsion of the moment. In their evocative power, for example, *snow-white*, *white as snow*, *white* are on a descending scale. Not only similes and metaphors, but the mere iteration of certain words also, could acquire the force of imagery. In his essay on ' Metaphor ', Middleton Murry makes two or three important discriminations :

" . . . the similarity should be a true similarity . . . so that it comes to us with an effect of revelation : something hitherto unknown is suddenly made known. To that extent the image is truly creative ; it marks an advance, for the writer who perceives it and the reader who receives it, in the conquest of some reality . . .

The imagery of poetry is in the main complex and suggestive ; the imagery of prose single and explicit . . . the highest function of imagery — namely, to define indefinable spiritual qualities . . .

But the greatest mastery of imagery does not lie in the use, however beautiful and revealing, of isolated images, but in the harmonious total impression produced by a succession of subtly related images".<sup>60</sup>

The supremacy of Shakespearian imagery rests on the fact that he could with a word, a phrase, sum up theme, plot, or character : the world is an unweeded garden that grows to seed — Denmark is a prison — the King that was to *this* is as Hyperion to a Satyr — Frailty, thy name is Woman ; in *King Lear*, Goneril and Regan are tigers, she-foxes, pelicans — Goneril is a detested kite and a gilded serpent — and Lear's refrains are *kill* (6 times),

<sup>60</sup> *Countries of the Mind*, Second Series (1931).

*howl* (4 times) and finally *never* (5 times) — and so the imagery comes in either animal-clusters (hog, fox, wolf, dog, lion : III. iv. 90) or iteration of the same words (I am, I am ; No cause, no cause), the effect in either case being overpowering.

Three critics of our time — Caroline F. E. Spurgeon in *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (1935), W. H. Clemen in *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (German edition, 1936 ; English edition, 1951), and Wilson Knight in his *The Wheel of Fire* (1930) and its successors — have laid students of Shakespeare under their debt by their outstanding contributions to this absorbing subject. Caroline Spurgeon counted as an 'image' every kind of simile and metaphor, and it was when she "had listed and classified and card-indexed and counted every image in every play thrice over, that the actual facts as to these dominating pictures stared me in the face".<sup>61</sup> In her enumeration, *Troilus and Cressida* tops with 339 images, *Hamlet* follows with 279, *Antony and Cleopatra* with 266 ; *The Shrew* accounts for only 92, *Julius Caesar* for 83, and *The Errors* for a mere 60. There are apparently 296 images in the Sonnets, 305 in *The Rape of Lucrece*, and 229 in *Venus and Adonis*.<sup>62</sup> Of course it is not the number that is so important as the quality of the images, and their role in bringing out the significance of the theme, the plot and the characters, and in contributing to the vigour of the prose and the iridescence of the poetry. Caroline Spurgeon's inferences from the recurrence of certain images about 'Shakespeare the Man' in the eleventh chapter of her book are, on the whole, rather less valuable than her discussions on the 'leading motives' in the several groups of plays. In Shakespeare's works generally, the bulk of the images are drawn — as one should have expected considering his antecedents — from Nature, from animals, birds, insects, reptiles, from home and hearth, the human body and human relations, life in times of war and peace, from mythology,

<sup>61</sup> Shakespeare Association Lecture (1930), now included in *Shakespeare Criticism, 1919-35* (1936), p. 19 ; most of the lecture is now incorporated in *Shakespeare's Imagery*. One eighteenth century critic, Walter Whiter, in his *A Specimen of a Commentary on Shakespeare* (1794), did pioneering work on Shakespeare's imagery, stressing the role of unconscious association of ideas in the cast of Shakespeare's thought and expression. But Whiter's book is not easily accessible, and Caroline Spurgeon was clearly not acquainted with it. For an account of Whiter's views, see Sailendra Kumar Sen's essay in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, XIII, 2 (1962), pp. 173-85.

<sup>62</sup> Appendix II in Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery*.

religion, learning, and the arts. "His poetry is soil-rooted, nature-rooted", says Wilson Knight; "Flowers, weeds, trees, and woodland glades; birds of all sorts, animals kind and cruel; rivers and seas and sea-cliffs; winds and weather in all moods; moon, sun, stars, shadowed or shining — they are on page after page, image after image".<sup>63</sup> Of even greater importance are the recurrent images which occur too in all the plays but more strikingly and purposefully in the tragedies. "This secondary or symbolic imagery within imagery", says Caroline Spurgeon, "is a marked characteristic of Shakespeare's art, indeed it is, perhaps, his most individual way of expressing his imaginative vision".<sup>64</sup>

In the early Histories, Spurgeon finds as a "constant running metaphor or picture" — the first striking instance being the Temple Garden scene in *1 Henry VI* (II. iv) — the imagery of growth and decay in a garden, the desolation being brought about by the carelessness or perversity of the gardener. In *2* and *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*, there is also the more violent imagery of the butcher and the slaughter-house. In *Richard II* and *Henry IV*, Richard is the Sun and the sweet lovely Rose; by contrast Bolingbroke is the comet, or the canker that destroys the rose. Such continuous symbolism, however, "is of a very elementary and obvious nature";<sup>65</sup> it could even be inappropriately elaborate, as when Marcus discovers the ravished and mutilated Lavinia in the early play, *Titus Andronicus* (II. iv. 16):

What stern ungentle hands  
Hath lopp'd, and hew'd, and made thy body bare  
Of her two branches — those sweet ornaments  
Whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in . . .  
Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,  
Like to a bubbling fountain stirr'd with wind,  
Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips,  
Coming and going with thy honey breath . . .<sup>66</sup>

In the Comedies, the purpose of the recurrent imagery is mainly to contribute to the background and atmosphere: for example,

<sup>63</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism, 1935-60*, p. 169.

<sup>64</sup> *Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 214.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p. 215. See also F. P. Wilson, *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare* (1954), p. 122.

<sup>66</sup> Clemens comments on the "unconcerned nature of these images . . . their almost wanton playfulness which reveals the incongruity". (*The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 26.)



in *A Dream*, 'moon' occurs 28 times and 'moonlight' 6 times (out of a total of 8 in all the plays); and both in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Much Ado*, the imagery is of war and weapons appropriate to the theme of the clash of wits as exemplified in the Rosaline-Berowne and Beatrice-Benedick encounters. The imagery is generally interesting in itself, and it also gives a glitter to the speech; but *organic* to the plot or characterisation it is not, — not as yet. The poet often scores at the expense of the dramatist.

In the Tragedies, on the other hand, the iterative imagery is increasingly geared to the central dramatic situation: there is thus the imagery of light and darkness in *Romeo and Juliet*, of sickness and disease in *Hamlet*, of blood and of ill-fitting new garments in *Macbeth*, of repellent insects and reptiles in *Othello*, of bodily anguish and torture in *King Lear*, of the belly as the storehouse and shop of the whole body in *Coriolanus*, of the 'vastidity' of the earth, sea and sky suggested by the "Brobdingnagian imagery" (Bethell's phrase) of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Of the final Romances, in *The Tempest* the imagery evokes a variety of sound values, "for the play itself is an absolute symphony of sound".<sup>67</sup> The imagery of the last plays serves to evoke the 'atmosphere' rather than give point or definition to the plot or characterisation.

While Spurgeon's statistical approach and monumental industry are worthy of all praise, her work is rather unselective and, except with regard to the Tragedies, her conclusions are not of great value. It is here W. H. Clemen's book scores over Spurgeon's. Clemen is selective, and his aim is to show "how the development of Shakespeare's imagery becomes peculiarly manifest in the way the images adapt themselves more and more organically to the structural form of drama".<sup>68</sup> As the artist grows in self-mastery and mastery of his art, nothing is introduced as an ornament, or an escape, or an excuse: the essential consideration is propriety and necessity in relation to the drama. There may be other reasons, but the needs of the drama are paramount; and, as Clemen points out,

"The Tragedies display Shakespeare's dramatic technique at its best. This means that every element of style, in fact every single line, now

<sup>67</sup> Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 300.

<sup>68</sup> *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 74.

becomes dramatically relevant. The same applies to the imagery, the images becoming an inherent part of the dramatic structure . . . Each tragedy has its own unmistakable individual nature, its own colour; it has its own landscape, its own atmosphere, its own diction. All details are closely connected, as in a finely meshed web . . . And the imagery of a tragedy plays an important part, not only in creating a dramatic unity of the atmosphere, but also in binding the separate elements of the play into a real organic structure".<sup>69</sup>

It is to be remembered that, whereas Comedy is 'mundane', Tragedy is 'cosmic'; and, certainly, Shakespeare's tragic heroes "stand in close relationship to the cosmos, the celestial bodies and the elements".<sup>70</sup> Of the individual tragedies, *Hamlet* is the most interesting from almost every point of view. Hamlet's first soliloquy was a new thing even for Shakespeare, for it is a passage minted as pure dramatic speech, rhetoric "completely transformed into poetic drama".<sup>71</sup> When Hamlet begins to speak, says Clemen, "the images fairly stream to him without the slightest effort — not as similes or conscious paraphrases, but as immediate and spontaneous visions".<sup>72</sup> The celebrated central soliloquy (III. i. 56ff), for example, verily seethes with imagery: 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', 'take arms against a sea of troubles', 'flesh is heir to', 'consummation devoutly to be wish'd', 'there's the rub', 'sleep of death', 'shuffled off this mortal coil', 'whips and scorns of time', 'the undiscover'd country', 'the native hue of resolution', 'sicklied o'er the pale cast of thought', 'enterprises of great pitch and moment', 'currents turn awry', and so on. How many of these images — and, from the other parts of *Hamlet*, 'a heaven-kissing hill', 'caviare to the general', 'metal more attractive', 'thought-sick', 'sickly days', 'a mote to trouble the mind's eye', 'a truant disposition', etc. etc. — haven't by now gone into everyday usage? Shakespeare makes the Ghost's description of the effect of the poison on the body the main symbolism of the play, exemplifying the gradual and inevitable contamination of the whole of Denmark by the poison of Claudius' ascendancy.<sup>73</sup> If in *Hamlet* the infection-

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 89, 104-5.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>71</sup> George Rylands, *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies* (Ed. by Granville-Barker & G. B. Garrison), p. 90.

<sup>72</sup> *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 106.

<sup>73</sup> See also Chapter XI, Section III, p. 411.

disease imagery emphasises the theme of the play, in *Othello* the function of images is more to reveal character. Othello's imagery is imaginative, Iago's Euphuistic; Othello is at his best in poetry, Iago in prose; Othello's images suggest freedom, vastness, stateliness and architectural magnificence, Iago's only constriction and contrivance, cynicism and negation; Othello's have the fierce energy of the elements, Iago's the cold clarity of calculation. In *King Lear*, the role of poetic imagery is really to create and project the storm itself — the storm within Lear and the storm raging on the Heath — with Lear still indomitable, still capable of the native fury of (III. ii) —

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks; rage, blow.  
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
 Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks.  
 You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,  
 Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
 Singe my white head . . .

Rumble thy bellyful. Spit, fire; spout, rain.  
 Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters.  
 I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness.

In *Timon of Athens*, the imagery is unevenly distributed over the play, but in the later Acts it is bold and violent when it touches on disease and decay. In *Coriolanus*, beast-imagery is rampant; and almost every other character takes a hand in painting the hero — he is compared, derisively or appreciatively, with Alexander and Hercules, Jove and Neptune; he is the rock, and the oak; and so on. For the description of Antony, of course, nothing less than cosmic imagery would do (for example, V. ii. 82ff)!

In the Romances, the rush of thought has a more restrained tempo than in the Tragedies: "the slower pace of action and speech allows better for fully executed imagery, even for elaboration of images which sometimes . . . even recall the manner of Shakespeare's early plays".<sup>74</sup> *The Tempest* is undoubtedly the most significant of the last plays. From the violence of the tempest to the songs of Ariel, from the dance of distraction to which the two sets of conspirators are led to the soft music ushering in Iris, Juno, Ceres who sing their benedictions on Ferdinand and Miranda, there is a wide range of rhythm and sound, dance and music, comprehending the whole arc from the

<sup>74</sup> *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 180.

stimulated tempest at one end to the achieved peace and calm at the other. Besides, it is the function of imagery in the play to invest the imaginary island with the hues, contours and sounds of seeming actuality.

While understandably both Spurgeon and Clemen linger long on the Tragedies, there is a difference in emphasis in their findings. Spurgeon relates the iterative images of the tragedies to their themes, but actually the imagery is — as it were — a sharer in the action : a clue to character : a kind of scattered chorus, a galaxy instead of the solitary Sun. It is as though something meant to be an embellishment has grown into one's being, mingling with the nerves, the blood-stream, the heart-beats ; Shakespeare has indeed " contrived to transform a means of expression, which by nature and virtue originated in the poetical sphere, into a purely and specifically *dramatic* instrument of unforeseen effectiveness and complexity ".<sup>75</sup> Just as a stone cast on a sheet of water, besides reaching its own appointed destination at the bottom, also starts ripples and wave upon wave in the pond, so too the poetic image, besides serving as the speaker's tool, becomes also a dynamic of ideas that connects character, motive and action in the drama.

As we pass from Spurgeon to Clemen the shift is from enumeration and inference to analysis and integration ; or the study of imagery as vivid expression to imagery itself as a form of dramatic action. In Wilson Knight's studies there is a further shift : concentration on a single symbol as the key to the understanding of a whole play. The crust of plot and character is pierced, and the kernel is seen as the life-giving symbol : in *Othello*, the hell-heaven, devil-angel, Iago-Desdemona antithesis, with the hero caught in between ; the tension between Trojan-Greek or intuition-intellect in *Troilus and Cressida* ; the Egypt-Rome polarity in *Antony and Cleopatra* ; the tempest-music orchestration in *Pericles* and *The Tempest* ; the grace of ' great creating nature ' in *The Winter's Tale*. As an example of the exploration of the imagery and symbolism of a single play, Cleanth Brooks's study of *Macbeth* stands apart.<sup>76</sup> The starting point is Macbeth's soliloquy (I. vii. 16) :

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 228-9.

<sup>76</sup> 'The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness', included in *The Well Wrought Urn* (1949) ; now printed in *Shakespeare Criticism*.

Besides, this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off;  
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin hors'd  
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
That tears shall drown the wind.

Spurgeon draws attention to the clothes-imagery in *Macbeth* — the recurrent idea that the new honours, like someone else's (stolen) clothes, don't fit the hero; and, after quoting the "new-born babe" passage adds that Macbeth "fills our imagination with the picture of its being broadcast through great spaces with reverberating sound".<sup>77</sup> But she doesn't give any special attention to "pity, like a naked new-born babe", and even her collection of images about children doesn't include this particular one.<sup>78</sup> Clemen indeed refers to the image, but only to illustrate "how far Shakespeare has moved from the conventional type of personification, and how his imagery tends towards the strange and the unique".<sup>79</sup> Now Cleanth Brooks focuses his main attention on this image, and tries to show that it is "perhaps the most powerful symbol in the tragedy".<sup>80</sup> The train of Macbeth's thoughts runs somewhat as follows: Should Duncan be killed, his virtues will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against the damnable act; and, independently of Duncan (and his virtues), Pity also will take up his cause, and expose and denounce the crime to everybody. What sort of power is this 'Pity'? Two similes seem to be used: it is (1) like a new-born babe, soft-sinewed, apparently helpless, yet in its own way trumpet-tongued because of its very innocence and helplessness, and so 'striding the blast' as an elemental irresistible force; and (2) like heaven's cherubim moving with great potency and speed ("hors'd/Upon the sightless couriers of the air"). Cleanth Brooks first raises

1935-60. Another example of such close analysis of a single play is Edmund Blunden's 'Shakespeare's Significances', on *King Lear* (1929).

<sup>77</sup> *Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 329.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 137-8.

<sup>79</sup> *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 98.

<sup>80</sup> *Shakespeare Criticism*, 1935-60, p. 245.

difficulties in interpretation and then ultimately solves them. A new-born baby can hardly "even toddle, much less ride the blast"; if a supernatural babe, an infant Hercules, is meant, it cannot be described as "the typical pitiable object"; even the alternative — "or heaven's cherubin" — though it could ride the blast is less appropriate than "onc of the great warrior arch-angels" would be; is it, possible, therefore that "Shakespeare could not make up his own mind?"<sup>81</sup> After an exhaustive exploration of the interlinked images and symbols in the play, Cleanth Brooks concludes:

"We can give an answer to the question put earlier: is Pity like the human and helpless babe, or powerful as the angel that rides the winds? It is both; and it is strong because of its very weakness".<sup>82</sup>

Actually, if we took the passage to mean that Pity is compared *only* to the human 'new-born babe', and "or heaven's cherubin" merely amplifies the idea of "striding the blast", the difficulties posed by Cleanth Brooks would disappear at once. The "naked new-born babe" = "heaven's cherubin"; and "striding the blast" = "hors'd/Upon the sightless couriers of the air". The paradox is that what is apparently helpless is not really so; smooth-sinewed, naked (meaning, without mask or any stain), the new-born babe is really heaven's cherubin, and its potency is incommensurable. While Duncan's virtues will "plead like angels" (before God), simple human pity — like the new-born babe — will move "every eye", and turn all humankind against Macbeth. By killing Duncan, Macbeth would forfeit the love of God as well as man, lose heaven and earth both. For the rest, Cleanth Brooks is most persuasive when he links up the images of the naked babe and the clothed daggers (pity and terror) as the two symbols that "encompass an astonishingly large area of the total situation".<sup>83</sup>

Purposive wordplay, imagery and symbolism can tantalise, grip and enchant the reader, for they are like the red corpuscles of the blood, and animate and sustain the life of prose as well as poetry. On the other hand, even these are but part of the total flow of language — just as the red corpuscles are but a part of

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 254.

the blood-stream. The obvious thing to be said about the language of Shakespearian drama is that much of it is in blank verse — and the rhymed verse of the early period and the prose patches and the occasional songs in the plays do not materially alter this basic fact. "Only one thing gives unity to the Elizabethan drama from Sackville to Shirley", says George Rylands, "and that is Style. A Will-of-the-wisp word which, in this connection, must denote both the Elizabethan idiom and Elizabethan blank verse"; and the latter is the "essential factor in Elizabethan drama, just as the Chorus is the essential factor in the tragedies of ancient Greece".<sup>84</sup> And so, in a sense, the history of Elizabethan drama and the history of the development of Shakespeare as a dramatic artist also become a study of the evolution and decadence of Elizabethan blank verse.

In his study of the Metre of *Macbeth*, D. L. Chambers coined four rather fanciful phrases, reminiscent of Dowden's on the 'Mind and Art', to sum up the varying characteristics of Shakespeare's verse during the four periods of his dramatic career: *the Vanity of Rhyme, the Balance of Power, the Discordant Weight of Thought, and the Licence of Weak Endings*. Although even comic scenes in the early plays are in verse, and rhymed verse, it is not necessary to castigate the "vanity of rhyme". When Shakespeare began writing, he had before him the unrhymed classical models on the one hand and the native tradition of rhymed verse on the other. Why did Shakespeare choose, in the first instance, rhymed rather than blank verse? "No one at the beginning of the 80's", says Gladys D. Willcock, "could have foretold the lines of eventual standardisation. It was still, therefore, natural enough that the young, plastic, Shakespeare should experiment with his prosodic medium as widely as with his *elocutio* and with types of plays".<sup>85</sup> Shakespeare's quick development as a wielder of metrical language was due to many factors. The Elizabethans, who had much less noise to put up with

<sup>84</sup> Introduction to *Elizabethan Tragedy*, ed. by George Rylands (1933). Besides the chapters on Shakespeare in Rylands's *Words and Poetry* (1930) and his contribution to *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, there is the chapter on the Development of Shakespeare's Style in G. B. Harrison's *Introducing Shakespeare* (Pelican Book) and there is also the comprehensive study, *The Language of Shakespeare's Plays* (1952), by B. Ifor Evans.

<sup>85</sup> 'Language and Poetry in Shakespeare's Early Plays' (1954), included in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. XL, p. 114.

than the people of our age, had a keen "aural reception"; and, since printing was still a comparatively new thing, the difference between written and oral communication was much less noticeable than today. Besides, as Shakespeare was also an actor, "he must have known, he did know, what was speakable and what was not".<sup>86</sup> Elizabethan dramatic verse, being fluid and multi-form, quickly went through two interesting intermediate stages — the lyrical (Lyly) and the rhetorical and declamatory (Marlowe and the early Shakespeare) — before it became wholly dramatic (in the mature Shakespeare). The vanity of rhyme, mere decorative imagery, the rhetoric of the studious school-room, and the intoxication of words as words give place soon enough to the demands of realism and dramatic speech but both touched by imagination and so united into a singular texture of elasticity, beauty and power. In the blank verse of *Richard II*, *1 and 2 Henry IV* and *Julius Caesar*, there is real 'balance of power'. Rylands points out that, broadly speaking, the verse written before 1600 was verse that could be *read*, while later verse was *dramatic* — in other words, verse that could be *spoken*. And *Hamlet* was the nodal point, for henceforth all the Himalayas of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry are ranged tier on tier, and criticism is struck quite dumb and only awed apprehension is possible. How did the change come about? Rylands thinks that Shakespeare hewed his way to dramatic verse by first successfully experimenting in the rhythms of prose, as for example in the speeches of Shylock and Falstaff, Benedick and Beatrice, Touchstone and Rosalind. When they speak, words come in an unchecked flood, and their precipitancy disarms us. Shakespeare's use of prose was "a late and unexpected development" (in Strachey's words), but the results are sometimes overwhelming. There is, for example, the 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' speech in *The Merchant of Venice* (III. i. 50ff); there is Falstaff's catechism on 'Honour' in *1 Henry IV* (V. i. 127ff); and there is the hardly less celebrated rhapsody on 'sherris-sack' in *2 Henry IV* (IV. iii. 90):

A good sherris-sack hath a twofold operation in it. It ascends me into the brain; dries me there all the foolish and dull and crudy vapours which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, p. 116.



and delectable shapes ; which delivered o'er to the voice, the tongue, which is the birth, becomes excellent wit. The second property of your excellent sherris is the warming of the blood ; which before, cold and settled, left the liver white and pale, which is the badge of pusillanimity and cowardice ; but the sherris warms it, and makes it course from the inwards to the parts extremes. It illumineth the face . . .

In this and other passages — even a mere sentence like “ We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow ” has the mark of the master — Shakespeare wrought a speech close to realism yet capable of poetic nuances. From this point of vantage it was easy for him to evolve a pattern of verse in which waves of thought counterpointed feet of sound with the result that the individual line was gathered up into the complex total scheme of the whole paragraph.

From *Hamlet* onwards, then, Shakespeare is the absolute master of the dramatic style. In the great soliloquies and animated dialogues of the period, since it is always a human limitation for expression to lag behind the agitated and muddled flow of idea and feeling, the verse does *seem* sometimes to betray the ‘ discordant weight of thought ’. The fierce prose of this period is meant to convey hysterical anger as in the nunnery scene in *Hamlet*, bawdy satire as in the speeches of Thersites, and misanthropic frenzy as in Timon’s diatribes ; or the prose achieves sheer poignancy as in the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*. For the rest, there is no advance from the prose of the Falstaff scenes and the Romantic Comedies. The mixture of heightened poetry and comical prose (Isabella’s advocacy, Pompey’s bawdy ; Macbeth’s speeches after the killing of Duncan, the Porter’s speech) in the serious plays of the great creative period is evidently done with a purpose, and not simply to please the groundlings. As with the soliloquy, in this matter too recent practice seems to have taken a cue from Shakespeare. “ It is interesting to observe ”, says S. L. Bethell, “ that Hollywood preserves this aspect of the popular tradition. Passages of pure farce, stylised and non-naturalistic, still occur in quite serious drama ”.<sup>87</sup>

Shakespeare’s use of prose recalls the use of dialect (Prakrit) in Sanskrit drama. Certain obvious ‘ rules ’ of discrimination between the use of prose and of verse are that servants and low-comedy characters (Launce, Costard, Gobbo, Dogberry, Auto-

<sup>87</sup> *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition*, p. 112.

lycus, the clowns, the grave-diggers, nondescript citizens, the watchmen, the men of Eastcheap) generally talk prose; letters (for example, Macbeth's to Lady Macbeth, Hamlet's to Horatio) are in prose;<sup>88</sup> witticism, logic-chopping and riddling speech (Hamlet talking to Polonius, or to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern), sustained argument (Brutus' oration in *Julius Caesar*, Hamlet's speech to the players), gossip and social tittle-tattle or mere reportage (in *The Winter's Tale*, I. i and V. ii), are all in prose; and prose is used effectively also when a sudden change in mood has to be suggested, as in the church scene in *Much Ado* where Beatrice works her way through a series of short sentences to the tremendous climax of 'Kill Claudio'. Finally, there is the alternation between prose and verse in Hamlet's letter to Ophelia, and between prose and song-snatches in Ophelia's speeches when she is mad.

This brings us to a consideration of the role of music and song in Shakespeare's plays.<sup>89</sup> Again, Shakespeare merely exploited what was already a popular feature of early Elizabethan drama, for music was then freely used as a background to the action, and songs were interspersed with the dialogues or dance-movements. There was an abundance of song-books and composers in Shakespeare's time, and dramatists were only too ready to exploit them. If Shakespeare's Company had an actor who did particularly well, parts like Feste's were created for him. Like cinema 'hits' today, certain songs were 'popular' and Shakespeare might have inserted a line or stanza to tickle the audience. Since there were no drop-curtains, songs were often used as a cover for the entrance or exit of actors. But excepting during the first few years when Shakespeare was finding his way through trial and error, he was astute enough and artist enough to fuse always theatrical convenience and necessity with dramatic pro-

<sup>88</sup> R. L. Megroz's *Shakespeare as a Letter-writer and Artist in Prose* (1927) is a useful study of this subject.

<sup>89</sup> Among the scholarly discussions on this subject are G. H. Cowling's *Music on the Shakespearean Stage* (1913), Richard Noble's *Shakespeare's Use of Song* (1923), E. W. Naylor's *Shakespeare and Music* (1931), Edward J. Dent's essay included in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, J. M. Nosworthy's 'Music and Its Function in the Romances of Shakespeare' (*Shakespeare Survey* 11), and F. W. Sternfeld's *Music in Shakespearean Tragedy* (1963), and W. H. Auden's 'Music in Shakespeare' in *The Dyer's Hand* (1963).

priety and artistic integrity. If background music was provided, it was both a theatrical artifice and the means of achieving dramatic illusion, of evoking atmosphere by a process of hypnotisation through the power of music. Again, in Ophelia's snatches of song and her mingling of song and prose, we can see the broken images of her own personality: harmony and discord pitted against each other, yet pushing her towards disaster. Desdemona's 'willow song' (IV. iii) is likewise meant to be the premonitory dirge, and is thus not only most affecting but is also perfectly in tune with the situation. In *King Lear*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, of course, music has a unique role to play. Background music prepares the way for Lear's recovery; Marina herself sings to help her father to come back to his senses; music is the prelude to statuesque Hermione coming down from the pedestal, to rejoin her husband and her long-lost daughter; and it is music at various planes and of various kinds that gives *The Tempest* its haunting quality.

In the 'existential' and 'sacrificial' plays of the 1600-1608 period, the 'elements' of dramatic language — wordplay, imagery, symbolism, prose, blank verse, music and song — are so blended that one has the feeling that the articulation (or even silence) at every point in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra* is utterly appropriate. In his handling of the blank verse medium, Shakespeare is like an expert cyclist who can afford to lift one or both arms from the handle, negotiate difficult turns without self-consciousness, and pedal fast or slow with perfect self-control; and so the verse of these plays shows consummateness and mastery, reproducing the fever and fervour of animated speech as also the glow and musical surge of indubitable poetry. Every kind of modulation and variation from the 'norm' (the five-foot iambic line) is introduced; the pause comes anywhere in the line — or there is no pause at all — and there are weak syllables or extra syllables at the end of the line; sometimes mere ejaculations, and sometimes streams of sound overflowing the line or a few lines, serve as units of speech, and the verse accordingly seethes with life and dances with light, and it is as though a verbal wizard has waved his wand and created harmonies of infinite variety. In the recognition-scene in *King Lear* (IV. vii), in the four lines 45-8 ("You do me wrong . . . molten lead"), out of 35 words only one word 'molten' is

disyllabic ; and in the following passage, out of 45 words only 3 are other than monosyllabic :

Be your tears wet ? Yes, faith. I pray weep not ;  
If you have *poison* for me I will drink it.  
I know you do not love me ; for your *sisters*  
Have, as I do *remember*, done me wrong :  
You have some cause, they have not.

The entire scene, in fact, is bathed in a transparency without a parallel even in Shakespeare. It is not sonorous language, or any trick of style, or anything on which we can place the finger and say ' This is the secret ', that accounts for the poetic power of the lines. It is simply the magician craftsman fusing situation, character and language into a wonder of elemental self-sufficing music. If we are in the presence of the ' sublime ' here, so are we when Othello makes one of his characteristic speeches, charged with the unmistakable ' Othello music ', or when Macbeth says —

I have liv'd long enough. My way of life  
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf . . .

She should have died hereafter ;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow . . .

In the last plays, in which D. L. Chambers finds " the licence of weak endings ", the variations from the law (or the ' by-laws ', as they have been facetiously called) acquire almost the force of the law, and the normal line becomes the exception. Still we are seldom far from the sweep of recognisable rhythm or the glow of authentic poetry. Elliptical phrases and parentheses abound in the last plays, and one has the feeling that the speaker (or Shakespeare himself) is impatient of normal grammatical curbs and even strict logical processes. As James Sutherland remarks in his essay on ' The Language of the Last Plays ', " so far is he (Shakespeare) indeed from slowing up as he grows older that he seems at times . . . to be driving himself harder than ever ".<sup>90</sup> Here's Leontes' speech, for example (1. ii. 267) :

Ha' not you seen. Camillo —  
But that's past doubt ; you have, or your eye-glass  
Is thicker than a cuckold's horn — or heard —

<sup>90</sup> *More Talking of Shakespeare*, ed. by John Garrett, p. 147.

For to a vision so apparent rumour  
 Cannot be mute — or thought — for cogitation  
 Resides not in that man that does not think —  
 My wife is slippery? If thou wilt confess —  
 Or else be impudently negative,  
 To have nor eyes nor ears nor thought — then say  
 My wife's a hobby-horse . . .

"Have you not seen . . . or heard . . . or thought . . . my wife is slippery? . . . confess . . . my wife's a hobby horse": such is the sense that has somehow to zig-zag its way to Camillo's understanding. If Shakespeare wasn't a 'bored' writer (as Strachey thought he was), he was at least (Sutherland thinks) a 'tired' writer; or was it only calculated recklessness revealing itself in alternate lassitude and excess, diffusion and concentration? The following four short passages illustrate well enough the stages of elegant conformity, high accomplishment, utter maturity and — as an aftermath — the nonchalance that comes from the consciousness of such mastery. This from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (I. i. 232):

Things base and vile, holding no quantity,  
 Love can transpose to form and dignity.  
 Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;  
 And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind.  
 Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste;  
 Wings and no eyes figure unheedy taste;  
 And therefore is Love said to be a child,  
 Because in choice he is so oft beguil'd.

This is regular rhymed verse, with modulation kept to the minimum; the conceits are pretty, and the sentiment is sugary. But a few years hence, and Shakespeare was writing the following speech for Portia (*Julius Caesar*, II. i. 261):

Is Brutus sick, and is it physical  
 To walk unbraced and suck up the humours  
 Of the dank morning? What, is Brutus sick,  
 And will he steal out of his wholesome bed,  
 To dare the vile contagion of the night,  
 And tempt the rheumy and unpurged air  
 To add unto his sickness?

There is some stylisation in the reasoning, but there is also obvious tension behind the speech; only three of the lines are

end-stopped, and the accents are nearly those of realistic speech. Isabella reasons too, not with her husband as Portia does, but with a stranger, a man who has in his hands the life of her brother (*Measure for Measure*, II. ii. 72) :

Alas ! alas !

Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once,  
And He that might the vantage best have took  
Found out the remedy. How would you be  
If He, which is the top of judgement, should  
But judge you as you are ? O think on that ;  
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,  
Like man new made.

Coming direct from the cloister, Isabella is hesitant — yet, being armed by her holiness, she makes her points with sure aim and closes with the simple, if marvellous, image of 'man new made'. Isabella does even better in her subsequent speeches, finding the right imagery and rhythm for her mood of analysis, argument, and impassioned exhortation, and she achieves her effects by avoiding all merely ornamental or rhetorical flourishes ; a girl like her could have — should have — spoken only like that in such a situation. And for an example of Shakespeare's verse mingling absolute freedom with absolute inner control, here's Prospero describing the plot against him to Miranda (I. ii. 121) :

This King of Naples, being an enemy  
To me inveterate, hearkens my brother's suit ;  
Which was, that he, in lieu o' th' premises,  
Of homage, and I know not how much tribute,  
Should presently extirpate me and mine  
Out of the dukedom, and confer fair Milan  
With all the honours on my brother. Whereon,  
A treacherous army levied, one midnight  
Fated to th' purpose . . . hurried thence  
Me and thy crying self.

Prospero, since he is only recollecting in tranquillity the old treachery, is far more self-controlled than Leontes in the passage quoted a little earlier. But the metrical freedom that Shakespeare permits to himself is the same in all the plays of the last period. We admire the art that seems to fly against all rules, but we also realise that Shakespeare has reached the farthest limits of viable vigorous blank verse. Any further freedom could

only mean the snapping of the tenuous threads that still somehow hold the verse together ; in fact, it meant the decadence, the break-up of the verse mould, and the opportune closure of the theatres.

But however much 'others' may abide our question, Shakespeare himself is free ! In his mature style he does really achieve the splendid unification — or fusion — of sound and sense, of speaker and context ; it is simply perfection of dramatic expression, without qualification of any kind ; it is something which comes to us like a lightning flash, or a child's prattle, or a sudden shower in mid-summer. Call it the 'sublime' after Longinus ; or 'the grand style' after Matthew Arnold or Saintsbury<sup>81</sup> ; or 'overhead poetry' after Sri Aurobindo<sup>82</sup> : the effect of this poetry on the responsive — the imaginatively attentive — reader or audience is unmistakable ; it is like a sudden shooting light, a projecting half-blinding blade ; it is an invasion that has all "the heavens of reality" (Charles Morgan's phrase) behind it. The first touch is but the prelude to a general or total embrace of the entire consciousness by the *ordonnance* behind the poetry of lines such as —

And flight of angels sing thee to thy rest !

Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,  
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion.

Finish, good lady ; the bright day is done.  
And we are for the dark.

In the dark backward and abysm of Time . . .

Shakespeare wrote at a time when people had a simple and absolute faith in poetry : when the climate of thought and endeavour was favourable to poetic experience and expression : when the nobility not only patronised poets but also essayed poetry on their own : when the best minds and the common people alike turned to poetry — and not to theology, or philosophy, or science — for imaging (or seeing imaged) their deepest thoughts and

<sup>81</sup> 'Shakespeare and the Grand Style' included in *Essays and Studies*, Vol. I, 1910.

<sup>82</sup> Sri Aurobindo's views on 'Overhead Poetry' are presented in his letters printed at the end of his *Savitri*, the definitive one-volume edition published in 1954.

highest aspirations. One might therefore say that the entire Shakespeare canon is but one comprehensive image and one great symphony compounding the elements of memory, ardour and hope, and orchestrating the rhythms of reality, drama and ideal possibility.

## IV

MORAL ARTISTRY<sup>93</sup>

Shakespeare, said Johnson, is "so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose". Lest this should appear too downright, Johnson also added: "From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally". This only means that reason and experience, not dogma and theory, governed Shakespeare's plotting and characterisation; he was writing dramas, not campaigning "to make the world better". He was not interested in proving a case, nor in projecting a formal philosophy. His plays have thus no detachable 'morality', though they do have a circumambient moral atmosphere. Shakespeare didn't tell his audience what they should do, but presented certain recognisable human situations in which (as it were with the connivance of the audience) certain things were being done. He was a practical dramatist writing for the 'great variety' of common theatre-goers, and both dramatist and audience hankered after an earthly crown, and well understood the limits of the practicable and the permissible. Life was hard, the bludgeonings of chance and ironic circumstance were numberless, but happiness too was realisable on earth and was indeed often realised by the fortunately and wisely endowed. There was thus a moral wholesomeness about the plays that clearly stemmed alike from the moral health and moral artistry of the dramatist himself.

Some recent critics seem to think that Shakespeare was throughout specifically preoccupied with moral issues. Donald A.

<sup>93</sup> This Section reproduces in part a review-article on Dr. Harbage's *As They Liked It* that appeared in *The Hindu* in April 1962.



Stauffer, for example, has studied in his *Shakespeare's World of Images* (1949) the complexity of Shakespeare's thought and the evolution of his moral ideas through the 'seven periods' of his dramatic career. Russell A. Fraser, in his *Shakespeare's Poetics* (1963), has tried to show that Shakespeare but rendered in terms of dramatic art the moralistic patterns popularised in the Renaissance 'emblem' books — that is, the Elizabethan counterparts of the Sunday strip-cartoons of our time. Another critic, John Vyvyan, has affirmed that Shakespeare's plays are (among other things) "magical poetry, excellent theatre, and ethical theorems of Euclidean logicity".<sup>24</sup> Poetry, certainly; excellent theatre, too; but Euclid? It was not Bacon that wrote Shakespeare!

There is also *As They Liked It*, Alfred Harbage's classic study of the moral impact of Shakespeare's plays on his audience, first published in 1947 and recently reissued with a new Foreword; "perhaps the best book on our subject yet published", according to J. I. M. Stewart. In his original and rather aggressive Preface, Harbage affirmed the 'moral homogeneity' of Shakespeare's plays and its 'basic conformity' with the tastes and convictions of "a large and representative audience, a cross section of the humanity of his day". Shakespeare at once morally 'excited' his audience and finally 'reassured' it: the violence of the effervescence and solution was followed by the purity and self-sufficiency of the crystallisation. Being an artist, Shakespeare made the excitement as well as the reassurance 'pleasurable'. It is this, Harbage said, that distinguishes Shakespeare's plays from "the more pretentious fiction of our own day", which often gives us the worst of both worlds — "excites but does not reassure, disturbs but does not stimulate, engages our interest but does not win our love".

Shakespeare was, after all, neither casuist nor preacher, neither partisan nor propagandist; he was a man, and he wrote for men. He was an artist who turned the raw-stuff of human life — whether he encountered it in an old tale or poem, in a play or historical narrative, in his own life or the life around him — into dramas that gave present delight as well as quickened the audience's moral sense, like light playing on placid waters. Shakespeare's plays were necessarily conditioned by the atmosphere of thought and opinion in his time. As M. C. Bradbrook writes,

<sup>24</sup> *The Shakespearian Ethic* (1959), p. 53.

"Elizabethan psychology had an ethical aim, and attempted to expound to the reader the primary moral problem of human life and provide him with the requisite means to meet it. Literature also had an ethical aim: it held the mirror up to Nature, and thereby enabled the children of Nature to correct their natural imperfections. Nature was plastic and could be moulded. Art was even more plastic than Nature".<sup>85</sup>

While Shakespeare didn't go out of his way to prod or provoke his audience (as, for example, an Ibsen or a Brecht did, or an Ionesco or Beckett does), he didn't either make a virtue of moral obliquity or neutralism. Coleridge mentioned as one of the distinguishing characteristics of Shakespeare's dramatic art his keeping throughout to the 'high road of life':

"Shakespeare has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice; — he never renders that amiable which religion and reason alike teach us to detest, or clothes impurity in the garb of virtue ... If he occasionally disgusts a keen sense of delicacy, he never injures the mind; he neither excites, nor flatters, passion, in order to degrade the subject of it; he does not use the faulty thing for a faulty purpose, nor carries on warfare against virtue, by causing wickedness to appear as no wickedness ... In Shakespeare vice never walks as in twilight; nothing is purposely out of its place; — he inverts not the order of nature and propriety ... he has no benevolent butchers, nor any sentimental rat-catchers".

In all this, Shakespeare must have sought and found an ally in his audience, for otherwise he couldn't have prospered so long as a popular dramatist. Harbage's very title '*As They Liked It*' seems to stress the fact that the plays were a feat of collaboration between the responsive appreciative audience and the morally sensitive dramatic artist:

"Shakespeare and his audience found each other, in a measure created each other. He was a quality writer for a quality audience ... The great Shakespearian discovery was that quality extended vertically through the social scale, not horizontally at the upper genteel, economic, and academic levels".

Nay more: between them, Shakespeare and 'They', "created the humane climate of subsequent generations, including, one hopes, our own".<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry* (1951), p. 96.

<sup>86</sup> *As They Liked It: A Study of Shakespeare's Moral Artistry* (Harper Torchbooks, 1961), pp. vi-vii.

This is not the whole truth, however. Pope, in the Preface to his edition of Shakespeare, said that "the Audience was generally composed of the meaner sort of people". Robert Bridges, in his 1907 essay on the subject, blamed Shakespeare's audience for corrupting his art as a dramatist. More recently, Walter Kaufmann has argued (in his *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*, 1959) that Shakespeare wrote down to a "boorish, lecherous and vulgar audience". Probably the truth of the matter was that his Audience was neither the ideal promoter nor the complete perverter of Shakespeare's dramatic art. Bradley is thus right when he says that Shakespeare "neither resisted the wishes of his audience nor gratified them without reserve . . . he gave the audience what it wanted, but in doing so gave it what it never dreamed of".<sup>87</sup> Shakespeare's 'popular' audience, whatever its predilections and shortcomings, lacked neither imagination nor a feeling for poetry; it no doubt asked for 'shews' and bustle and battles, for musical catches and clowning and bawdy, but it also responded agreeably to wit and argument and poetry, and it reacted appropriately to moral evil and good. It received enthusiastically *Romeo and Juliet*, the four great tragedies, and the Falstaff plays, but no less enthusiastically the early *Titus* and the late *Pericles*; but several other and better plays, including *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, fell flat and had to be withdrawn after a few performances. On the other hand, *Titus* and *Pericles* do, after all, present a reasonably just distribution of good and evil, whereas both *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* are on a first view morally ambivalent. Whether or not Shakespeare's audience was always sensitive to flights of imaginative poetry, it was obviously conscious of right and wrong, — like the (still) largely 'illiterate' audiences that visit cinema houses in India and applaud the righteous 'hero' and wildly jeer at the Machiavellian 'villain'.

Shakespeare, although he does not present us with a moral system susceptible to codification, certainly reveals his ethical insights in the choice of his themes, in his handling of his sources (in what he retains and even more in what he drops), and also in the recurrent ideas and imagery of his plays. One thing is especially noteworthy: the ethical seriousness of the plotting of the plays and the preponderance of the 'good' characters over

<sup>87</sup> *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 365.

the 'bad'. Harbage points out that in only 6 of the 38 plays (including both *Pericles* and *The Noble Kinsmen*) "is an act of fornication or adultery, as distinct from the suspicion of such acts, really encompassed".<sup>98</sup> Again, out of 775 distinct characters in the 38 plays, "378 (49 per cent) are indubitably good, 150 (20 per cent) are good in the main, 106 (14 per cent) are bad in the main, and 133 (17 per cent) are indubitably bad".<sup>99</sup> In the 13 Comedies and 4 Romances, the 'good' constitute over 80 per cent, and in the Tragedies and Historics, over 60 per cent; the good people are besides equally distributed between the 'high' class, 'middle' class, and the 'low' class (69 per cent, 72 per cent and 67 per cent respectively). In the entire canon, whereas 74 per cent of the women are good, only 68 per cent of the men are good; in the Comedies alone, 96 per cent of the women are good, while in the Tragedies the proportion is much lower, being only 42 per cent. These statistics demonstrate how "the Shakespearian world is a place to meet fine people and many of them:

How many goodly creatures are there here!  
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world  
That has such people in't".<sup>100</sup>

But of course we shouldn't allow statistics altogether to overawe us, and Harbage himself brings them only at the end of his argument. Actually, Shakespeare's characters — in this resembling the character-creations of a Vyasa or a Homer — are seldom flatly 'good' or 'bad'; rather are they 'broad' (in the Dostoevskian sense), uncertain, unpredictable. The fascination of Shakespearian drama lies in its vivid projection of the conflict between good and evil, order and disorder, normality and im-

<sup>98</sup> As *They Liked It*, p. xiii. Again, in *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (1952), Harbage contrasts the immortality of the coterie plays produced in the private theatres with the general moral health of the plays meant for the public theatres: "Nothing is clearer in Shakespeare's own plays than the adherence to a single standard of sexual morality . . . in Shakespearian drama age is not covetous, and youth is not lecherous" (p. 192); "Adultery in Shakespeare is never treated with humour, tolerance, or understanding. It is never linked to inadequacy or prior dereliction of the spouse, or with natural ennui, but with moral debility, as in the case of Antony, unbridled appetite, as in the theory of Iago, or sheer mystery — an arbitrary proneness to 'prey on garbage' — as postulated by Hamlet" (p. 249).

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, p. 172.

propriety, and this war is waged, sometimes without, and sometimes — and more agonisingly — within the mind and heart of the protagonists. Shakespeare's audience had not only a lively sense of humour and an appetite for sinuous verse and gorgeous imagery; it could also feel completely engaged when moral issues were presented to it. Whenever Shakespeare reworked an old theme, he invariably injected into it 'moral notions', and this excited the audience sufficiently to compel it into a stance of 'moral partisanship'. A Shakespearian character — even a Hamlet! — may be no more than a bundle of words, but being charged with poetry these bundles of words seem suddenly to matter to us, and matter a great deal, because they manage somehow to project 'real' human beings into our midst who call for a human response, either of sympathy or antipathy, from us. 'Hamlet', 'Macbeth', 'Falstaff', 'Isabella', 'Coriolanus', 'Leontes' thus become "*foci* of moral interest", and we cannot shake ourselves free from them or cultivate an attitude of indifference to them. If one critic is violently allergic to Isabella, another is ready almost to worship the ground she treads on. Further, part of the fascination of the plays is due to the 'moral dilemmas' in which the protagonists are caught: Is Hamlet to kill Claudius at prayer or not? Is Brutus to lead the conspiracy against his friend or allow him to wax into a tyrant? Is Coriolanus to pocket his pride or suppress his patriotism? It is easy to choose between white and black; but what if the choice should appear to be between brown and brown? Shakespeare's plays do not really pose any new problems, nor do they offer any novel solutions of the problems that have proved refractory. The essence of the human predicament is isolated and held up to our gaze, and this confrontation is its own reward. We make a circuit of variegated emotions — surprise, anger, disgust, admiration, terror, pity — and are content to be back, exhausted but also becalmed, in our familiar moorings of traditional truth to which Shakespeare has now given a new freshness as of sunshine after a long spell of storm and rain. The moral artistry of Shakespeare consists in involving his audience in the unfolding moral action of the plays. Like the Chorus in Greek drama (though not as obtrusively), the audience becomes almost a sharer in the action of a Shakespeare play — a sharer, not on the physical, but on the psychological and moral plane. And every reader too, every

*sahridaya*, is a 'sharer' in a way that is peculiar to him alone. There are collective reactions and there are individual responses to Shakespeare's plays, and all are valid in their respective spheres. Why does Hamlet delay? Why does Iago act in the way he does? Like these 'moral enigmas', there are also 'moral paradoxes': Why do we enjoy Falstaff's company? Why do we 'admire' even a Richard III? These enigmas and paradoxes tease us out of thought — tease, and also (ultimately) satisfy, though each theatre-goer, each reader, will have his own grounds for satisfaction. Hence the multiple interpretations of a Hamlet, a Falstaff, a Cleopatra.

"All his life", says John Wain, "Shakespeare voyaged towards a greater and greater inclusiveness".<sup>101</sup> His world was all the worlds, and was peopled by multifarious humanity. Basically Shakespeare didn't change, but as he grew older he plumbed deeper depths and scaled dizzier heights; he leapt across abysses, he forged tremendous bridges of possibility. "The difference between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*", says M. M. Reese, "may be traced to a deepened experience, not to an altered vision".<sup>102</sup> Shakespeare didn't invent either of the stories, and both affirm the absolute glory of love, — though disaster overtakes both pairs of lovers. In *Romeo and Juliet* the judgement is directed, not against the lovers, but the warring families and the ineffectual Duke; in *Antony and Cleopatra*, although Shakespeare wouldn't — or simply couldn't — condemn the lovers, some judgement is implied in Antony's suicide and Cleopatra's taking off in the high Roman fashion. The dying Cleopatra's "Husband, I come" is both the apotheosis of their love in terms of transcendence and an implied judgement on its terrestrial course. Likewise, Shakespeare isn't censorious, and he wouldn't 'condemn' Falstaff; but, perhaps, he wouldn't have us condemn the Prince either. As Shakespeare presents them, Falstaff is not exactly a martyr, and Hal is not quite a murderer. Shakespeare is sensitive to good and evil, but he is even more sensitive to the ramifications of human frailty. It is not lack of

<sup>101</sup> *More Talking of Shakespeare*, ed. by John Garrett, p. 167. In his more recent essay (*Encounter*, March 1964), Wain once more stresses Shakespeare's inclusiveness, his talent for gathering up the memories of the race into a valuable new synthesis. The plays are poetry and myth, and are to be experienced rather than dissected.

<sup>102</sup> *Shakespeare: His World and His Work*, p. 408.

moral sensibility that makes Shakespeare avoid easy categorisation and condemnation, but rather his experience of the unpredictable element in human nature — the fact that there is some soul of good in things apparently evil, and some taint of evil in things professedly good. Aren't the critics themselves hopelessly divided about some of Shakespeare's characters — Isabella and her 'rancid' chastity, for example, or the 'noble' Moor, Othello? No wonder Shakespeare refuses to sort out and award plums and punishments with easy self-assurance. He prefers on the whole to state the 'facts' of the case (not a relevant detail omitted) as he sees them, and he leaves us free to judge — if we care, or if we dare! Some pointers, no doubt, there are and these even he who gallops cannot possibly miss. Shakespeare, as we have seen, generally avoids involving his characters in pre-marital sexual indulgence and all forms of unlawful love. He would rather deviate from his source, as in *Measure for Measure*, than countenance his heroine submitting to the unscrupulous magistrate. Rowe, in the Preface to his edition of Shakespeare (1709), pointed out that although "*Hamlet* is founded on much the same Tale with the *Electra* of Sophocles", — although up to a point the histories of Orestes and Hamlet run parallel, — "'tis with wonderful Art and Justness of Judgement that the Poet restrains him (*Hamlet*) from doing violence to his Mother". Actually Gertrude dies reconciled to her son, and after detecting the culminating villainy of Claudius. It is not that Shakespeare shrinks from the portrayal of violence as such; there is the blinding of Gloucester, and there is the massacre of the Macduff children — to cite but two examples from the mature plays. Shakespeare knew that evil undoubtedly exists; and evil may be met by evil, thereby yielding more evil, more suffering involving the innocent and guilty alike. Yet how otherwise is evil to be met and mastered?

This problem of 'crime' and 'punishment' figures often in Shakespeare's plays, but the solution offered is hardly ever dogmatic or categorical. But there are certain broad indications that it is impossible to ignore. "Putting it briefly", says Harbage, "in Shakespeare's plays as in our courts, offenders are punished to the degree that their offences have taken effect".<sup>103</sup> To sin in thought, to sin in even merely *attempting* a crime, may be bad enough; but these need not be visited with punishment. Only

<sup>103</sup> *As They Liked It*, p. 130.

accomplished irreparable crime is to be punished, the rest being a matter of conscience, something for the judge *within* to pronounce a verdict on. Isabella has made the perfect pronouncement on this subject (V. i. 449) :

His act did not o'ertake his had intent.  
And must be buried but as an intent  
That perish'd by the way. Thoughts are no subjects :  
Intents but merely thoughts.

Sin that has not materialised as injury to another person, although it remains Sin, is no cognisable crime ; society might pardon it, or at least ignore it. Where the evil of vice is apparently innate (as in Aaron, Richard Crookback or Iago), it daunts us as a beginningless malignant force, and we seem to be powerless for the time being ; but even such an eruption exhausts itself in due course, and mankind is able to breathe free again. But where the evil is only a temporary aberration (as in Posthumus, Leontes or Alonso), there is hope for them, they can repent their way back to salvation, and Grace will meet them more than half-way. The average Shakespearian character would like to be understanding, gracious and compassionate rather than otherwise, and he is a votary of life and the good things it offers, and not of death. But all this applies only to the plays with a 'happy' ending, for in the Tragedies we see, not 'poetic', but 'rough' justice. No principle of equivalence can be established with regard to the crimes of a Claudius, an Iago, a Regan and a Macbeth and the 'punishment' meted out to them. Even so, the conclusion in the great Shakespearian tragedies isn't wholly oppressive. In the first Annual Shakespeare Lecture (1911) delivered before the British Academy, J. J. Jusserand observed :

"The fate of a Hamlet, an Ophelia, a Desdemona, an Othello, carries, to be sure, no concrete moral with it ; the noblest, the purest, the most generous, sink into the dark abyss after agonising tortures, and one can scarcely imagine what, being human, they should have avoided to escape their misery. Their story was undoubtedly written 'without any moral purpose', but not without any moral effect. It obliges human hearts to melt, it teaches them pity".

Our confrontation of the tragedy makes us capable of pity, of tears, of admiration for these victims of tragic circumstance and



of courage to out-face life's cruellest trials. "These plays", says Harbage, "all treat of *sad particular instances* in which evil bore its bitter fruit. What can be identified can be avoided. Plays which make us look at the thing, hate it, and pity its victims do not offend our sense of justice."<sup>104</sup> As for the Histories, the dramatist is in shackles to known facts, and hence he cannot ordinarily display the same subtle moral artistry in the plotting and the characterisation. Yct the Histories too, by and large, unfold patterns of nemesis; and what is the double tetralogy from *Richard II* to *Richard III* — viewed at a stretch — but a sustained demonstration of the law that to sow the wind of evil is only to reap the whirlwind of disaster that must encompass innocent and guilty alike?

In the final plays, however, the sinners who repent and the victims who are willing to forget the past and forgive the evil-doers seem to be able to build a better future than the impenitent and the unforgiving, for these can succeed only in piling up horror on horror, wrong on wrong, forging a chain of nemesis extending up to the crack of doom. Beyond the barbaric ethic of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' and even transcending the everyday ethic enshrined in the Penal Code, there is the higher ethic that affirms, 'Resist not evil'. Only absolute love can feed this ethic, and such love occurs as a blinding flash illuminating the murky atmosphere of tragedies like *Othello* or *King Lear*. It appears as a more settled light in the last plays, for there it is part of the soul's radiance of the girl heroines, Marina, Imogen, Perdita and Miranda. In the very last play, *Henry VIII*, the final vision is that of "the *child* richly habited in a mantle" — the naked new-born babe — who inspires Cranmer to a thrilling ritualistic prophecy about the Future. Take it all in all, Shakespeare's world — though it is not a world where the lights

<sup>104</sup>*ibid.*, p. 151. In his *Shakespeare's Tragic Justice* (1962), C. J. Sisson concentrates on the 4 great tragedies only. Macbeth and Othello receive public and private justice respectively: the former is like a star that waxes into a portent of brightness and explodes at last, yet leaving the sky poorer, while the latter is like a stately galleon that has been suddenly shipwrecked — our sympathy is thus denied to neither of them. Hamlet develops from a mere would-be avenger to God's justiciar in Denmark, and in the end he is the true King who performs the will of Heaven against the usurper and murderer. *King Lear* insinuates that "power and justice, human or divine, are none of them ultimately important after all"; what is important is only love — "the love that moves the sun and all the stars".

always shine or the verities always rule — is nevertheless a world which doesn't obscure or laugh away the basic moral issues. The dark is never presented as the higher light, the lesser is never presented as the better reason, and evil and happiness are never perversely linked in terms of causality. We are undoubtedly the better for our sojourn in this world of Shakespeare's plays, for although the sky has been often overcast, although we have heard rumblings of reverberating thunder, it has been a bracing and rewarding experience all the same, for "the air is clean, the soil sweet, and the plenty (as with Chaucer) distinguishably God's."<sup>106</sup>

## V

## 'GOD OF OUR IDOLATRY'

In conclusion, how shall we crown Shakespeare?

Some 180 years ago, the American Colonies achieved their independence of Britain, but there was no breaking away from Shakespeare. The United States are today inhabited by a polyglot population, but the basis of their national culture remains English literature, with Shakespeare for its life, its soul. In his British Academy Lecture (1927), Ashley Thorndike said:

"You can't be President of the United States unless you have read Shakespeare ... He is indeed the god of our idolatry. Washington, Lincoln, Shakespeare, they are the three whom Americans universally worship, and you will not find a fourth of ours or any other nation to add to this trinity ... He voices to Americans and to all, tolerance, magnanimity, greatness of mind and heart".

Again, in 1840, Carlyle already visualised the end of Britain's Indian Empire, but of Shakespeare he said:

"... this Shakespeare does not go, he lasts forever with us; we cannot give up our Shakespeare! ... This King Shakespeare, does not he shine, in crowned sovereignty, over us all, as the noblest, gentlest, yet strongest of rallying-signs ..."

Britain as a political force had to 'quit India' in 1947, but Shakespeare is with us still here in India, for we too "cannot

<sup>106</sup> J. I. M. Stewart in "Shakespeare's Men and their Morals" (*Shakespeare Criticism*, 1935-60, p. 305).

give up our Shakespeare". Speaking, not for any particular linguistic region alone but for all India, isn't Shakespeare a "god of our idolatry" too — making a third with Valmiki and Vyasa?

In India, literature and the arts have from times immemorial had a religious impulsion. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* rank as *itihasas*, as dharma shastras, — as the scripture of the people. The 'Book Beautiful' (*Sundara Kanda*) from the *Ramayana* and the Lord's Song (*Bhagavad Gita*) from the *Mahabharata* are still read day by day in a mood of prayerful attention. Rama the hero of the *Ramayana* and Krishna who plays so crucial a role in the *Mahabharata* are popularly looked upon as 'avatars' of Vishnu (one of the Hindu Trinity) and are worshipped by millions all over the country. 'Ram Navami' and 'Krishna Jayanti' — the birthdays of Rama and Krishna respectively — are auspicious as well as festive occasions in countless Hindu homes, and are 'public holidays' as well. The art of Valmiki and of Vyasa is thus of an order altogether different from that of Homer, or Aeschylus, or Shakespeare. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* do indeed constitute the core of our emotional and spiritual make-up, and it is as though Rama and Sita, Bharata and Lakshmana, Hanuman and Vibhishana, Kunti and Gandhari, Krishna and Yudhistira, Arjuna and Karna, Draupadi and Bhima, are intertwined in our very nerves and arteries — as though they are our psychic tremors, our racial memories, our national epiphanies, our dreams, nightmares, and fantasies, all, all rolled into a body of literature ensouling the image of a great people. Week after week in 1944, the late V. S. Srinivasa Sastri discoursed in English on the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, bringing tears to the eyes of his sophisticated Mylapore audience; and he was often himself on the verge of an emotional breakdown.<sup>108</sup> Scholars disciplined in the old tradition still give expositions in village and city of particular episodes from the two great epics, and the simple and the sophisticated sit, like the deer and the tiger amicably squatting together, and 3 or 4 hours pass before the discourse ends, and the men, women and children trek back to their homes. To attend a well-delivered discourse on, say, the Rama-Bharata dialogue in the forest or Krishna's embassy to the Kurus, is to feel involved personally in the *lila* of God when

<sup>108</sup> The lectures have now been published as *Lectures on the 'Ramayana'*.

He incarnates Himself as Man. And sometimes one of the epics is covered in its entirety, and then the exposition goes on, evening after evening, for a whole month or a whole year. It is by such means that, notwithstanding mass illiteracy, popular culture and humane ethics have been widely disseminated in India throughout the ages; and it is by such means, again, that, in defiance of the stratification of the 'castes', religion by rearing itself on a spiritual base has proved the great equaliser, levelling *upwards*, bringing God to mingle with men and raising man to God. What makes us 'destitute' — in the ultimate sense — is not the lack of this or that 'amenity', nor the loss of 'position' or 'power', but estrangement from God. But in India, as F. W. Bain has said, "the gods are not yet pallid spectral ghosts, rationalistic residual of neuter gender, but the immortal love of their wives, and conjugal affection is what it ought to be, typified in heaven, the highest pleasure even of the gods".<sup>107</sup> To read the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, or the *Bhagavata*, is verily to have an appointment with God: and also, incidentally, to be implicated in tense timeless moments of drama, to be overwhelmed by high imaginative poetry, and to be exposed to sublime ethical, social and political teaching.

No writer, ancient or modern, can be for the people what Valmiki and Vyasa are to Indian humanity. Yet simply as a poet and creator, Shakespeare must rank with Homer — and with Valmiki and Vyasa.<sup>108</sup> It is not a question of the intellectual grasp alone: Bernard Shaw thought that he was a far greater thinker than Shakespeare; and so, perhaps, Ben Jonson thought too. Strictly as mystical and philosophical poets, Dante and Sri Aurobindo look massive by the side of Shakespeare, while Goethe's intellect seems a phenomenon apart and unique. The *Mahabharata* is gravely encyclopaedic, comprehending as it does all the worlds, all life, all thought. But on his own chosen ground of poetic drama, Shakespeare out-tops everybody else; and even simply as poet and creator, few equal him and none excels him. Sri Aurobindo once half-flippantly arranged the world's great poets in three rows —

<sup>107</sup> Preface to *In the Great God's Hair* (1904).

<sup>108</sup> It is assumed that Homer, Valmiki and Vyasa were individuals, not committees, even as it is assumed that Shakespeare was himself and not Bacon — or somebody else.

*First row :* Valmiki, Homer, Shakespeare  
*Second row :* Aeschylus, Virgil, Kalidasa, Dante, Milton  
*Third row :* Goethe —

and commented as follows :

"... the first three have at once supreme imaginative originality, supreme poetic gift, widest scope and supreme creative genius. Each is a sort of poetic demiurge who has created a world of his own. Dante's triple world beyond is more constructed by the poetic seeing mind than by this kind of elemental demiurgic power — otherwise he would rank by their side; the same with Kalidasa. Aeschylus is a seer and creator but on a much smaller scale. Virgil and Milton have a less spontaneous breath of creative genius; one or two typical figures excepted, they live rather by what they have said than by what they have made".<sup>108</sup>

Later he added : "Vyasa could very well claim a place beside Valmiki, Sophocles beside Aeschylus". Again, contrasting Goethe and Shakespeare, Sri Aurobindo said :

"Yes, Goethe goes much deeper than Shakespeare; he had an incomparably greater intellect than the English Poet and sounded problems of life and thought Shakespeare had no means of approaching even. But he was certainly not a greater poet; I do not find myself very ready to admit either that he was Shakespeare's equal. He wrote out of a high poetic intelligence but his style and movement nowhere came near the poetic power, the magic, the sovereign expression and profound or subtle rhythms of Shakespeare".<sup>110</sup>

Shakespeare, then, ranks on the one side with Homer, on the other with Valmiki and Vyasa : these are the supreme poets, the sovereign masters of rhythm and language, the creators of whole worlds of self-sufficing beauty, power and significance. Shakespeare may lack something of the elemental primordial force of Homer and the prophetic and apocalyptic power of the Indian Rishis, but his munificent variety and gift of universality gain for him a place even by the side of these three ultimate lords of language and song. If Shakespeare has boldly taken over and shaped anew Homeric figures like Hector, Ulysses, Paris, Agamemnon and Achilles, to us in India the rejected Katharine of *Henry VIII* recalls the rejected Sita of the *Ramayana*; the

<sup>108</sup> *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* (On Poetry and Literature), 1949, pp. 301-2.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, p. 305.

'tragedy of the lost handkerchief' that of the 'lost ring'; the disgraced but noble Hermione the rejected but undefeated Sakuntala in the *Mahabharata*; the vain wifely pleadings of Calphurnia with Caesar the like pleadings of Tara with Vali when he goes out the last time to fight his brother Sugriva; the motherly pleadings of Volumnia to Coriolanus those of Kunti to her son Karna. Hector's Andromache, Rama's Sita and Coriolanus' Virgilia might be sisters. The great heroes and heroines of Homer, Valmiki, Vyasa and Shakespeare thus defy the barriers of space, time and language, and are seen to be contemporaneous — and with us too.

Hazlitt placed Shakespeare as a 'poet of nature' on a par with Homer, and said further that Shakespeare "might be said to combine the powers of Aeschylus and Aristophanes, of Dante and Rabelais, in his own mind". The creator of Hamlet and the 'bastard' Faulconbridge was also the creator of Lear and Falstaff.<sup>111</sup> Richness, multiplicity, excess, the dazzle of variety, and a total comprehension are the 'marks' of Shakespeare; and if we must single out one work as the focus of the rest, — as the centre of the triple worlds of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, — there is *King Lear*. With reference to Keats's remark that "Shakespeare led a life of allegory; his works are the comments on it", Theodore Spencer says that Shakespeare's career could be divided into three stages — experiment, tragic vision, final affirmation: birth, striving and death, renewal — and his life viewed in relation to his art so that "historical description and technical analysis merge into an understanding of the symbolism of all men's lives".<sup>112</sup> As in Aeschylus (of the *Eumenides*) and in Sophocles (of *Oedipus at Coloneus*), in Shakespeare too the end-note is acceptance and reconciliation. Again, like Dante, Shakespeare also saw "man's situation in relation to the three realms in which his thought and action move".<sup>113</sup> Beyond the Inferno of Goneril's and Regan's malignity, and the Purgatory of the Heath rocked by the storm, there comes Cordelia-Beatrice to convey Lear to the threshold of paradisaal happiness. "*King*

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Emile Legouis: "Falstaff is bigger than nature and to a certain extent out of it ... In this one character, Shakespeare has summed up the spirit of the Rabelaisian epic". (*Aspects of Shakespeare*, 1933, p. 94.)

<sup>112</sup> *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, pp. 222-3.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, p. 214.

*Lear*, I feel", says John F. Danby, "is at least as Christian as the *Divine Comedy*".<sup>114</sup>

Shakespeare has been compared also with other great Western writers and artists. For example, comparing Bach the composer with Shakespeare, George Sampson writes :

"Bach and Shakespeare accepted not only current conditions but current forms. They were not innovators ; they were content to take what they found and make the best of it . . . Bach, like Shakespeare, is for all time and for all men. He is a universal genius . . . Finally, let us notice both in Bach and Shakespeare a moving reticence, — an almost overwhelming impersonality that seems at odds with what we know of the men themselves".<sup>115</sup>

Wilson Knight thinks that Goethe and Tolstoy are nearest to Shakespeare in spiritual experience, sees a close similarity between Timon-Shakespeare and the later Tolstoy who severed himself from civilisation, and finds in both writers "a violent, exaggerated sex-desire. It is as though the extreme erotic idealism of the artist's mind stimulates a repressed sex-instinct into virulent, unruly force."<sup>116</sup> Theodore Spencer, however, makes the important discrimination that "the end of *War and Peace* lacks the exaltation of Shakespeare's last plays, because the medium is not poetry, but the meaning is the same".<sup>117</sup> The parallelism between Shakespeare and Dostoevsky is, perhaps, rather more striking : Stavrogin is Dostoevsky's Hamlet, Nastasia Filippovna his Cleopatra, Raskolnikoff his Macbeth. In the art of psychological abstraction, Dostoevsky's humour too is sometimes touched with a Shakespearian — or a Franciscan — quality. And their great tragic characters are alike "apocalyptic visions of psychic ecstasies".<sup>118</sup>

Of modern European dramatists, Ibsen — as a dramatist, though not as a poet — has the best claims to be compared with Shakespeare. Ibsen's 'problem plays' and 'last plays' have been meaningfully studied alongside of Shakespeare's 'dark comedies' and final Romances. Yet already Ibsen seems to be

<sup>114</sup> *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, p. 205.

<sup>115</sup> *The 100 Best Essays*, edited by the Earl of Birkenhead, 4th edition, pp. 844ff.

<sup>116</sup> *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 272.

<sup>117</sup> *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, p. 215.

<sup>118</sup> The phrase is John Cowper Powys's, from his *The Meaning of Culture*.

shrinking somewhat from the proportions built up for him by the Archer-Shaw school of apologists 75 years ago, and Shakespeare remains "the largest and most comprehensive soul" that ever engaged in poetic drama, — perhaps the most fecund creator of variegated humanity next to God himself!

In English literature, of course, Shakespeare's pre-eminence is taken to be mere self-evident truth. It was Landor who said: "A rib of Shakespeare would have made a Milton: the same portion of Milton, all poets born ever since". There may be growls of dissent regarding the second half of Landor's proposition, but not about the first. Wordsworth, Dickens, and Hardy have also occasionally been mentioned in the same breath with Shakespeare, though only with heavy asthmatic qualifications. Dover Wilson, for instance, speculates on the parallel phenomena of 'Tintern Abbey Revisited' and 'Stratford-upon-Avon Revisited', and concludes that "Wordsworth explains the last plays of Shakespeare, and the last plays lend to Wordsworth's lines (in *Tintern Abbey*) the force of a new revelation".<sup>119</sup> But Rossiter is not quite so sure; Wordsworth's was a less inclusive experience than Shakespeare's, and his appeal too is more restricted:

"Wordsworth recognised the terror-element in his intuition of Nature; but he backed away . . . Put Wordsworth's Nature beside Shakespeare's, and he is a poet of mood. 'There is no 'Heart of Darkness' in him'.<sup>120</sup>

Hence there is no beyonding the Darkness — no emerging into new Light — either. Unlike Wordsworth, Shakespeare knew humanity as well as 'satanity', and knew too the mad leap of transcendence that left both behind.

The world of Dickens is no doubt as richly populated as Shakespeare's, but it comprises more the middle of humanity than the heights or the depths. Dickens's sight was sharp enough at short-range, but the altitudes and beatitudes were not for him; he lacked the tragic vision, and he lacked the mystical insight that gives a peculiar glow to plays so different as *King Lear* and *The Tempest*. Hardy's world, on the other hand, has closer affinities to Shakespeare's, but it is barer, more constricted, more bleak and sombre, and more foggy and uninviting, than either Shakespeare's or even Dickens's world. *The Dynasts* of course

<sup>119</sup> *The Essential Shakespeare*, p. 136.

<sup>120</sup> *Angel with Horns*, pp. 309-10.



shows that Hardy could see the historic process in epic terms, and the major Wessex Novels are certainly lighted up by the true tragic vision. Rustic humour mingles disconcertingly with muted tragic cries, and in this too Hardy's art reminds us of Shakespeare's. Besides, Hardy — also like Shakespeare — specialised in exploring the feminine consciousness, and in probing the supernatural world that is juxtaposed with our own world. There are parallelisms in detail too: Viviette and Swithin in *Two on a Tower* are a Victorian variation of Venus and Adonis;<sup>121</sup> Father Time's killings and suicide "because we are too menny" are as unspeakably horrible as the murder of Macduff's children; the dying Henchard harks back to Timon; and Egdon Heath is a sullen and sinister place, and might be the Heath in *King Lear* after the storm has spent itself out. But Hardy's plottings are often too cunningly contrived, and his irony is poisonously edged. Although more of a poet and more austere in his art than Dickens, Hardy's failure also is in the final analysis the failure of his poetry, for it is poetry that enfranchises us from the bonds of time and locality, and takes us to the imperishable world of the imagination.

Shakespeare has thus no peer in English literature, and not many equals in world literature. Of the great figures of the Renaissance Age, Shakespeare was among the greatest; and George Brandes hails him as one of the supreme trio with Michael Angelo (who died when Shakespeare was born) and Cervantes (who died within a few days of Shakespeare's death); and if Shakespeare was Michael Angelo's peer in pathos, he was equally Cervantes' in humour. Colridge has called him "the morning star, the guide and the pioneer, of true philosophy", but Shakespeare is more truly the quintessential and complete poet in whose work we see the recordation of the heart-beats of the entire human race. Shakespeare's world is the world of Everyman, his art is the ensouling of the image of men's littleness and greatness, grovelling and scalings, defeats and triumphs. We exchange pulses with these other men — these men, women, and children — and we journey back and forth like Shakespeare's own Pericles, alternatively buoyed up by hope or daunted by failure, till at last the Pisgah vision of Possibility is for a second vouchsafed to us, and even the 'music of the spheres' is heard — to

<sup>121</sup> Cf. H. C. Duffin, *Thomas Hardy* (1962 edition), p. 30.

echo evermore in our ears. As it has been said of the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, of Shakespeare too we might say in the quatercentenary year of his birth that, not for another 400 years alone, but for as long as the hills stand and the rivers flow, for as long as civilised mankind survives on earth, so long will the darlings of Shakespeare's imagination mingle in global humanity's 'business and bosoms', exercising the mind, setting the heart ablaze, and attuning the still centre of the soul to the ineffable rhythm of Existence.

## APPENDIX I

### CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

<i>Date</i>	<i>Age of Shakespeare</i>	<i>Shakespeare's Life &amp; Work</i>
1558	Accession of Elizabeth (17 Nov.) Kyd and Greene born	..
1564	Marlowe born	Shakespeare born (23 April: St. George's Day; christening, 26 April)
1576	'The Theatre' built by James Burbage at Shore-ditch	..
1577	..	Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, in difficulties
1578	Holinshed's <i>Chronicles</i> Lyly's <i>Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit</i>	..
1579	North's translation of Plutarch's <i>Lives</i>	..
1581	Seneca's <i>Tenue Tragedies</i> in English translation	Death of Richard Hathaway (Anne's father)
1582	..	Licence for Shakespeare's marriage (entries in the Bishop of Worcester's Register: 27 & 28 Nov.)
1583	..	Birth of Susanna Shakespeare (christening, 26 May)
1585	..	Birth of the twins, Hamnet and Judith (christening, 2 Feb.)
1587	Execution of Mary Queen of Scots Leicester's Men and Queen's Men visit Stratford	
1588	Defeat of the Spanish Armada	1 <i>Henry VI</i>
1589	Greene's <i>Pandosto</i> Hakluyt's <i>Voyages</i> Kyd's <i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>	2 <i>Henry VI</i>

# CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

695

<i>Date</i>	<i>Age of Shakespeare</i>	<i>Shakespeare's Life &amp; Work</i>
1590	Lodge's <i>Rosalynde</i> Spenser's <i>The Faerie Queene</i> (Bks. i-iii)	3 <i>Henry VI</i>
1591	Sidney's <i>Astrophel and Stella</i>	<i>Richard III</i> <i>King John</i>
1592	Henslowe's Diary begun Marlowe's <i>Dr. Faustus</i> Greene's <i>Groatsworth of Wit</i> Death of Greene	<i>Titus Andronicus</i> <i>The Comedy of Errors</i>
1593	Death of Marlowe Chapman's <i>Shadow of Night</i>	<i>Venus and Adonis</i> (SR : 18 April) <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> <i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>
1594	Death of Kyd <i>Willobie his Avisa</i> Chamberlain's Men at the Theatre; Admiral's Men at the Rose	<i>The Rape of Lucrece</i> (SR : 9 May) Shakespeare joins Chamberlain's Men <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
1595	Spenser's <i>Amoretti</i> Sidney's <i>Apologie for Poetrie</i>	Shakespeare living in the Parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> <i>Richard II</i>
1596	Death of Peele	Death of Hamnet Shakespeare (11 Aug.) Grant of Coat of Arms to John Shakespeare (20 Oct.) <i>1 Henry IV</i>
1597	Bacon's <i>Essays</i>	<i>2 Henry IV</i> Shakespeare purchases New Place at Stratford
1598	Mere's <i>Palladis Tania</i> Ben Jonson's <i>Every Man in His Humour</i> Chapman's <i>Illad</i> (7 Books)	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> <i>As You Like It</i>
1599	'The Globe' occupied by Chamberlain's Men Essex in Ireland	<i>Henry V</i> <i>Julius Caesar</i> Shakespeare lives in lodgings in the Liberty of Clink on Bankside
1600	'Fortune' built by Alleyn East India Company formed	<i>Twelfth Night</i> <i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i> <i>Hamlet</i>

<i>Date</i>	<i>Age of Shakespeare</i>	<i>Shakespeare's Life &amp; Work</i>
1601	Execution of Essex 'War of the Theatres'	Death of John Shakespeare (8 Sept.) <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> <i>Love's Martyr</i> (containing 'The Phoenix and the Turtle')
1602	..	Shakespeare purchases the cottage in Chapel Lane at Stratford <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>
1603	Death of Queen Elizabeth (24 March) Accession of James I Florio's translation of Montaigne's <i>Essays</i>	Shakespeare one of the King's Servants <i>Measure for Measure</i>
1604	..	<i>Othello</i> Shakespeare moves to the parish of St. Olave's near Cripplegate and lodges with the Mountjoy family
1605	The Gunpowder Plot Bacon's <i>Advancement of Learning</i>	Shakespeare makes more purchases at Stratford <i>King Lear</i> <i>Timon of Athens</i>
1606	Jonson's <i>Volpone</i>	<i>Macbeth</i> Susanna Shakespeare marries Dr. John Hall (5 June)
1607	..	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>
1608	The Blackfriars Theatre leased by King's Servants	Birth of Elizabeth Hall, Shakespeare's grand-daughter (21 Feb.) Burial of Mary Shakespeare (9 Sept.) <i>Coriolanus</i> <i>Pericles</i>
1609	..	<i>Cymbeline</i> <i>Sonnets</i> (SR: 20 May)
1610	..	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>
1611	The Authorised Version of the Bible Donne's <i>Anatomy of the World</i>	<i>The Tempest</i>

# CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

697

<i>Date</i>	<i>Age of Shakespeare</i>	<i>Shakespeare's Life &amp; Work</i>
1612	Skelton's translation of <i>Don Quixote</i>	<i>Henry VIII</i> Shakespeare makes a deposition at the Court of Requests in the matrimonial case involving Mountjoy's daughter, Mary, and her husband, Stephen Belott
1613	Marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Frederick Elector Palatine (14 Feb.) Globe Theatre burnt (29 June)	Shakespeare purchases a house in London close to the Blackfriars Theatre (10 March)
1614	Globe Theatre rebuilt	..
1616	..	Judith Shakespeare married to Thomas Quiney (10 Feb.) Shakespeare's Will (25 March) Death of Shakespeare (23 April)
1619	..	Miscarriage of the attempt of Pavier and Jaggard to bring out a collection of Shakespeare's plays
1623	..	First Folio (SR : 8 Nov.)

The above table gives the date of publication of some important books, as also the probable date of composition and production of Shakespeare's plays and of some of the plays of his contemporaries. In the dating of Shakespeare's plays, the earlier of two possible dates is given; thus, while the dating of *I Henry VI* is 1588-9 in Chapter III. Section iii, in the above table the date is given as 1588.

# APPENDIX II METRICAL AND OTHER STATISTICS

	No. of lines	Blank verse	5-foot rhyme	Prose	Songs etc.	% of double endings	% of run-on lines	% of speech endings	No. of light & weak endings	No. of images
1 Hen. VI	2676	2371	296	9	..	8	10	5	4	152
2 Hen. VI	3087	2503	94	490	..	14	11	1	3	185
3 Hen. VI	2902	2761	139	2	..	14	10	1	3	200
Rich. III	3610	3374	162	74	..	20	13	3	4	234
K. John	2570	2410	160	6	..	6	18	13	7	248
Titus	2523	2335	149	39	..	9	12	3	5	151
Errors	1754	1147	378	229	..	17	13	1	0	60
Shrew	2553	1915	157	478	3	18	8	4	2	92
Verona	2191	1496	111	569	15	18	12	6	0	102
LLL	2518	582	1135	759	42	8	18	10	3	204
R. & J.	2995	2087	463	406	39	8	14	15	7	204
A Dream	2102	751	933	394	24	7	13	17	1	133
Venice	2554	1883	130	541	10	18	22	22	7	136
Rich. II	2755	2215	540	11	..	11	20	7	4	247
1 Hen. IV	2993	1680	68	1245	..	5	23	14	7	207
2 Hen. IV	3229	1498	56	1655	20	16	21	17	1	235

Much Ado	2541	654	40	1810	37	23	19	21	2	164
AYL	2611	926	150	1437	98	26	17	22	2	180
Henry V	3213	1852	84	1268	9	21	22	18	2	224
Caesar	2234	32	32	187	..	20	19	20	10	83
T. Night	2430	752	118	1496	64	26	15	36	4	131
M. Wives	2635	215	72	2318	30	27	20	21	1	103
Hamlet	3799	2511	146	1065	77	23	23	52	8	279
Troilus	3319	2063	172	1054	30	24	27	31	6	339
All's Well	2736	1174	279	1269	14	29	28	74	3	151
MM	2666	1565	56	1017	28	26	23	51	7	136
Othello	3248	2534	76	612	26	28	20	41	2	192
K. Lear	3224	2222	70	824	108	29	29	61	6	193
Timon	2314	1517	151	646	..	25	33	63	21	139
Macbeth	2086	1714	234	138	..	26	37	77	23	208
A & C.	3019	2711	32	270	6	27	43	78	99	266
Coriolanus	3305	2539	26	740	..	28	46	79	104	189
Pericles	2398	1436	225	418	16	20	18	71	82	118
Cymbeline	3276	2597	90	463	126	31	46	85	130	187
W.T.	2960	2084	34	74	58	31	38	88	100	155
Tempest	2016	1424	59	442	91	35	42	85	67	103
Hen. VIII	2807	2652	70	73	12	47	46	72	90	182

The figures in the last column are from Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery*; the figures in the remaining columns are mainly from the *Cambridge Shakespeare*, and from König, and Ingram (New Shakespeare Society's Transactions, 1874).



## INDEX

- Abercrombie, Lascelles, 23 fn, 618,  
 619, 622, 624, 625, 645  
*Abijnana Sakuntalam*, 469, 560.  
 585, 586  
*Acharnians*, 137, 204  
 actors' companies, 127 ff  
 Adams, J. Cranford, 126  
 Addison, Joseph, 616  
*Admirable Crichton, The*, 146, 487  
*Admiral's Men*, 123, 127, 128,  
 170  
*Aeneid, The*, 30, 223, 247  
 Aeschylus, 34, 82, 107, 118, 137,  
 176, 179, 180, 204 ff, 559, 611,  
 627, 637, 686, 688, 689  
*Agamemnon*, 176, 561  
*Ajax*, 180  
*A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*,  
 224  
 Alexander, Peter, xvi, 1, 3 fn, 8,  
 11 fn, 17, 18 fn, 21, 24 ff, 28 fn,  
 29, 31, 32 fn, 35, 43, 45 ff, 58,  
 59, 69 ff, 74, 75, 109, 144 ff, 185,  
 199, 223, 239, 252, 324, 372,  
 406, 412, 413, 464 fn, 497, 518,  
 528, 551, 563, 564 fn  
*Alexander and Campaspe*, 134  
 Allen, Percy, 15 fn  
 Allen, D. C., 296  
 Alley, Edward, 123, 124, 127,  
 170  
*All for Love*, 534 fn, 535  
 Alvarez, A., 327  
*Amoretti*, 307  
*Amphitruo*, 32, 140, 142  
 Annesley, Sir Brian, 472  
*Antigone*, 180  
*Apology for Raimond Sebond*, 105  
*Apollonius of Tyre*, 142  
 Appian, 387, 524  
*Arcadia*, 472, 473, 555, 562, 566  
 Archer, William, 379  
*Arden of Feversham*, 38 fn  
 Ariosto, 140, 351  
 Aristophanes, 107, 137, 204, 689  
 Aristotle, 34, 179, 184  
*Armada, The Spanish*, xvi, 12, 94,  
 214  
 Armin, Robert, 128  
 Arnold, Matthew, 674  
*Arraignment of Paris, The*, 134  
*Ars Amatoria*, 363  
 Ascham, Roger, 92  
 Aspley, William, 37  
*Astrophel and Stella*, 76, 307  
 Aubrey, John, 31, 291, 613  
 Auden, W. H., 374, 396, 669 fn  
 Aurelius, Marcus, 92  
 Aurobindo, Sri, 6, 104, 343,  
 413 fn, 605, 624, 628, 674, 687,  
 688  
 Authorised Version (of the Bible),  
*The*, 7, 92  
 Babcock, Weston, 621  
 Bach, Johann Sebastian, 690  
 Bacon, Lord, 14, 15, 443, 621  
 Bain, F. W., 687  
 Baldwin, T. W., 21, 29, 140, 295  
 Balzac, Honore de, 491  
 Barber, C. L., 333 fn  
 Barnfield, Richard, 307  
 Barnes, Barnabe, 307  
 Barrie, Sir James, 487  
 Barton, John, 279  
 Battenhouse, R. W., 433  
 Bayne, Ronald, 94  
 Beaumont, Francis, 13, 214, 556  
 Beckett, Samuel, xv, 645, 646, 677  
 Beeston, Christopher, 31 ff, 291  
 Beethoven, Ludwig van, 563  
 Belleforest, Francois de, 399, 415  
 Benson, John, 292  
 Bentley, Gerald, 558  
 Bethell, S. L., 522, 585, 593, 609,  
 620, 660, 668  
 Betterton, Thomas, 483  
*Bhagavad Gita, The*, 105, 413,  
 686  
*Bhagavata, The*, 687  
 Bhasa, 627  
 Bhavabhuti, 585, 627  
*Birth of Merlin, The*, 38 fn  
 Bishop Bale, 206  
 Black, M. W., xii  
 'Blackfriars', *The*, 123, 128, 131  
 Blount, Edward, 37  
 Blunden, Edmund, 664 fn  
 Boas, Frederick S., 81, 82, 380,  
 381

- Boccaccio, Giovanni, 574  
*Bonif Konwar*, 338  
 Bonjour, A., 215  
*Book of Job*, The, 558  
 Bradbrook, M. C., 159, 505 fn,  
 556, 643, 676  
 Bradley, A. C., 1, 11, 17, 235,  
 238, 333, 397, 404 fn, 442,  
 443 fn, 465, 479, 499, 502, 513,  
 538, 544, 549, 560, 613, 618,  
 620, 678  
 Brandes, George, 528, 556, 692  
 Brecht, Bert, xv, 677  
 Breton, Nicholas, 307  
 Bridges, Robert, 465, 617, 641 fn,  
 678  
 Brigstocke, W. Osborne, 423  
 Brooke, Arthur, 194, 200  
 Brooke, Stopford, 349, 484 fn  
 Brooke, C. F. Tucker, 38 fn  
 Brooks, Cleanth, 655, 663 ff  
 Brooks, H. F., 43, 142, 157, 574 fn  
*Brothers Karamazov*, The, 173,  
 406, 563  
 Brown, Huntington, 475  
 Brown, Ivor, 25, 28, 78 ff, 297,  
 612 fn  
 Brown, John Russell, 69, 135 fn,  
 151, 333, 344, 346  
 Browning, Robert, 433  
 Bruno, Giordano, 159  
 Buland, Mable, 631  
 Bullough, Geoffrey, 145, 150, 152,  
 153, 168, 199, 222 fn, 290, 296,  
 301, 342, 372, 430  
 Bush, Douglas, 593  
 Butler, Samuel, 309  
 Butt, John, 40 fn  
 Burhage, James, 120, 122, 123,  
 127, 128  
 Burn, Michael, 114  
 Buxton, John, 97, 296 fn, 409  
 Byron, Lord, 6  
 Byrne, St. Clare, 90  
  
 Cain, Edward, 234  
*Cambyses*, 117  
 Campbell, Lewis, 177 fn  
 Campbell, Lily B., 400 fn, 548  
 Capell, Edward, 17, 40, 41, 48, 55  
 Carlyle, Thomas, 614, 637, 685  
 Carter, E. H., 280  
 Case, R. H., 43, 545 fn  
*Castell of Perseverance*, 114  
 Caxton, William, 92, 415  
 Cervantes, Miguel de, 317, 692  
 Chamberlain's Men, 76, 77, 123 ff,  
 127 ff, 170  
 Chambers, D. L., 75, 666, 671  
 Chambers, E. K., 21, 23 fn, 24,  
 64, 69, 70, 98, 99, 118, 126,  
 139 fn, 293 fn, 308, 311, 320,  
 372, 373 fn, 556 fn, 558  
 Chambers, R. W., 263 fn, 282,  
 439 fn  
 Chapman, George, 13, 23, 64, 66,  
 160, 314 fn  
 Charlton, H. B., 143, 148, 156,  
 163, 165, 333, 337, 378, 381,  
 465 fn, 505  
 Charney, Maurice, 519 fn  
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, 293, 301, 415,  
 443, 683  
 Chettle, Henry, 612  
*Chocphoroe*, 177, 561  
 Churchill, R. C., 16  
 Chute, Marchette, 31  
 Clark, W. G., 11  
 Clemen, Wolfgang, 185 fn, 410,  
 411, 462 fn, 644, 646, 658 ff  
*Cleopatra*, 524  
 Coghill, Nevill, 637, 638  
 Coleridge, Mary, 425  
 Coleridge, S. T., 17, 141, 158, 319,  
 520, 605, 618, 620, 625, 626,  
 653, 677, 692  
 Collier, J. P., 42  
 Collins, J. Churton, 134, 135 fn  
 Condell, Henry, 10, 13, 14, 17,  
 18, 22, 24, 25, 32, 35 ff, 128,  
 252, 328, 378, 379, 566, 596  
 611, 615  
*Confessio Amantis*, 566  
*Confidential Clerk*, The, 137  
 Conrad, Hermann Isaac, 10, 67  
 Constable, Henry, 307  
 Cook, David, 499 fn  
 Coomaraswamy, Ananda, 639  
 Cooper, Duff, 12 fn  
 Copernicus, Nicholas, 105, 110  
 Corinthians, 585  
 Cornford, F. M., 203  
 Courthope, W. J., 21 fn  
 Cowling, George H., 74, 669 fn  
 Craiz, Hardin, 1, 21, 35, 43, 91,  
 107, 111 ff, 621, 628  
 Craig, W. J., 43, 45, 49, 50, 53 ff  
*Crime and Punishment*, 173  
 Crofts, J. E., 197, 199  
 Cunliffe, John W., 117  
  
 Daiches, David, 520  
 Danby, John F., 488 fn, 490,  
 519 fn, 559, 562, 620, 690  
 Daniell, David Scott, 13 fn

- Daniel, Samuel, 64, 65, 71, 222, 307, 524  
 Dante Alighieri, 383, 393, 394, 485, 488 fn, 513, 563, 624, 637, 653, 688, 689  
*Dark is Light Enough, The*, 604  
 David, Richard, 61, 160  
*David and Bethsabe*, 134  
 Davies, John (of Hereford), 224, 294  
 Davies, Richard, 558  
*Decameron*, 574  
 Deighton, K., 50  
 Dekker, Thomas, 13, 73, 342, 558  
 Dent, Edward J., 669 fn  
 De Quincey, Thomas, 17, 616  
 de Witt, Johannes, 125  
 Dickens, Charles, 691  
*Divine Comedy, The (Divina Commedia)*, 558, 563, 585, 637, 690  
*Doctor Faustus*, 114, 115, 117  
*Doll's House, A*, 81, 379, 380  
 Donne, John, 15, 82, 519  
*Don Quixote*, 317  
 Dostoevsky, Fyodor, 173, 563, 641, 646, 690  
 Dowden, Edward, 1, 4, 10, 11, 16, 73, 84, 140, 156, 287, 315 fn, 378 ff, 395, 404, 519, 535, 556, 576, 632 fn, 646, 666  
 Doyle, Arthur Conan, 374  
 Drake, Francis, 92, 94  
 Drake, Nathan, 575  
 Drayton, Michael, 64, 307, 314  
*Dream of Fair Women, A*, 521  
 Drinkwater, John, 503  
 Driver, Tom F., 513, 586 fn, 637 fn  
 Drummond, William (of Hawthornden), 616  
 Dryden, John, 534 fn, 605, 616  
 Duffin, H. C., 692 fn  
*Dunciad, The*, 40  
 Duthio, G. I., 151, 197, 230, 540, 549, 561  
 Dyce, A., 42  
 Dyer, Edward, 14  
*Dynasts, The*, 224, 691  
 Ebisch, W., xii  
*Edward I*, 209  
*Edward II*, 117, 203, 209, 210  
*Edward III*, 38 fn, 220  
 Edwards, Philip, 41, 555 fn, 567 fn  
 Edwards, Richard, 116  
*Egoist, The*, 449  
 Einstein, Albert, 622  
*Electra*, 682  
 Eliot, John (the grammarian), 159  
 Eliot, T. S., 89, 137, 184, 465, 572, 618, 646  
 Elizabethan audiences, 617 ff  
 Elizabethan educationists, 92  
 Elizabethan seamen, 92  
 Elizabethan sonnet-sequences, 76, 307-8  
 Elizabethan theatres, 122 ff  
 Elizabethan world-picture, *The*, 100 ff  
 Ellen Terry, 353  
 Elliott, G. R., 71, 503, 510, 513  
 Ellis-Fermor, Una, 43, 74, 499 fn, 539 fn, 627, 638, 648  
 Ellrodt, Robert, 325  
 Elyot, Sir Thomas, 92, 153, 238  
 Emerson, R. W., 324, 627  
 Empson, William, 652  
*End of the Night, The*, 514  
*Endymion*, 300  
*Enemy of the People, An*, 379  
 Epistle to the Romans, *The*, 518  
*Epitia*, 430, 431  
 Erasmus, Desiderius, 92  
 Essex, The Earl of, 65, 70, 159, 343, 409, 528  
*Ethan Frome*, 86  
*Eumenides*, 178, 559 ff, 689  
 Euripides, 82, 107, 117, 137, 181 ff, 586, 611, 627, 637  
 Evans, B. Ifor, 666 fn  
 Evans, Bertrand, 333 fn, 375 fn, 633  
 Evans, G. Blackmore, 24  
 Evans, Gareth Lloyd, 245  
*Everyman*, 114, 115  
*Every Man in His Humour*, 373  
*Faerie Queene, The*, 471  
*Fair Em*, 38 fn  
*Famous Victories of Henry V, The*, 211 fn, 214, 252  
 Farmer, Richard, 32  
 Faulkner, William, 456  
*Faust*, 557, 558  
 Feuillerat, Albert, 23, 24  
 Field, Richard, 292  
 Figgis, Darrel, 25 fn  
*Finnegans Wake*, 645  
 Flatter, Richard, 397, 406  
 Fleay, F. G., 10, 67  
 Fletcher, Giles, 307  
 Fletcher, John, 13, 214, 556  
 Florio, John, 77 fn, 139  
 Fluchere, Henry, 433 fn

- Ford, John, 73, 618  
 Forman, Simon, 63, 71, 587  
 'Fortune', The, 124  
*Four PP*, 115  
 Foxe, John, 215  
 Fraser, Russell A., 489, 676  
*Frederick of Jennen*, 574, 575  
 Freud, Sigmund, 645  
*Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, 134 ff  
 Friedman, William F. and Elizabeth, 15 fn  
 Fripp, E. L., 26, 30, 171, 302, 310, 505  
*Frogs*, 137  
 Froissart, Jean, 92, 222  
 Fry, Christopher, 604  
 Frye, Northrop, 309 fn, 321  
 Frye, P. H., 82, 182  
 Furness, H. H., 42  
 Furnivall, F. J., 4, 16, 60  
  
*Galathea*, 134  
*Galilai*, 423  
*Gammer Gurton's Needle*, 133  
 Gandhi, Mahatma, 396, 543  
 Gardner, Helen, 361, 629 fn  
 Garnier, Robert, 116, 183  
 Garrick, David, 483  
 Gascoigne, George, 140, 146  
 Gautama Buddha, 396, 402  
 Gautier, Theophile, 521  
 Gervinus, G. G., 73 fn, 77, 575  
*Ghosts*, 81, 379, 634  
 Gibson, H. N., 16  
 Gielgud, Sir John, 594, 595  
 Giraldu Cinthio, 116, 183, 430, 431, 455 ff, 463  
*Glismond of Salerne*, 184  
 Gittings, Robert, 320  
 'Globe', The, 123 ff, 131, 587, 618  
 Glover, J., 11  
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 6, 557, 558, 565, 613, 687, 688, 690  
 Golding, Arthur, 30 fn, 33, 291  
 Goldsmith, Oliver, 406  
 Gollancz, Israel, 556  
 Goodere, Sir Henry, 31  
*Gorboduc*, 116, 184, 208, 209  
 Gordon, George, 4, 20, 133, 332 ff, 370, 442 fn, 521, 634, 635, 649, 650  
 Gosse, Edmund, 380  
 Gosson, Stephen, 122, 342  
 Gower, John, 301, 566  
 Granville-Barker, Harley, 10 fn, 163, 390, 406, 462 fn, 464, 480, 625, 640  
 Greene, Graham, 91  
 Greene, Robert, 12, 20, 22, 23, 63, 75, 117, 130, 133 ff, 139, 211, 214, 252, 562, 587, 589, 612, 618, 646  
 Greg, W. W., 17, 39, 43, 51, 52, 56, 118  
 Greville, Fulke, 14  
 Griffin, Bartholomew, 307  
*Groatworth of Wit, A*, 12, 63, 75, 612  
 Gupta, S. C. Sen, 333, 458 fn  
  
 Hakluyt, Richard, 93  
 Hall, John (Dr.), 13, 311, 505  
 Hall, Edward, 222, 223, 253  
 Halliday, F. E., 64  
 Hamill, H., 49, 51, 509 fn  
 Hamilton, Guy, 433 fn  
 Hanmer, Sir Thomas, 40, 48, 49  
*Happy Day*, 645  
 Harbage, Alfred, xiii, 1, 651 fn, 675 fn, 676 ff, 682, 684  
 Hardy, Thomas, 247, 498, 691, 692  
 Harris, Bernard, 69, 135 fn  
 Harris, Frank, 17, 318, 647  
 Harrison, Frederick, 183  
 Harrison, G. B., 10 fn, 39 fn, 69, 90, 92, 94, 119 fn, 170 fn, 308, 666 fn  
 Hart, Alfred, 22, 61  
 Hart, H. C., 458, 459  
 Hart, John, 15  
 Harvey, Gabriel, 159, 160, 293, 312, 320  
 Harvey, Sir William, 310, 320  
 Hathaway, Richard, 27  
 Hayward, Sir John, 224  
 Hazlitt, William, 17, 306, 614, 689  
*Heccatomthi*, 430  
*Hedda Gabler*, 379  
 Heminge, John, 10, 13, 14, 17, 18, 22 ff, 32, 35 ff, 128, 252, 328, 378, 379, 566, 596, 611, 615  
 Hemingway, Ernest, 91  
 Heneage, Sir Thomas, 171 fn  
 Heur, H., 545 fn  
 Henslowe, Philip, 64, 118, 119, 123, 127, 254, 399, 611  
 Henry VIII, 93  
 Henryson, Robert, 415  
*Heptameron of Civill Discourses*, 431

- Herbert, William (Earl of Pembroke), 311  
*Hercules Furens*, 182, 189  
 Herford, C. H., 619  
*Hero and Leander*, 69  
 Herodotus, 206 fn  
 Heywood, John, 115  
 Heywood, Thomas, 13, 73, 128, 566  
 Hickson, S., 21 fn  
 Highet, Gilbert, 138, 145  
 Hinman, Charlton, 38  
 Hoeniger, F. D., 555 fn, 567 fn  
 Hoffman, Calvin, 15  
 Holinshed, Raphael, 214, 215, 222, 253, 388, 471, 505, 506, 508, 513, 574, 627  
 Holland, Hugh, 37  
 Holloway, John, 550  
 Holmes, Martin, 131, 156, 159, 171 fn  
 Homer, 6, 92, 293, 387, 415, 679, 686 ff  
 Honigsmann, E. A. J., 215, 219  
 Hotson, Leslie, 65, 76, 309, 320, 364, 377, 638 fn  
 Houghton, R. E. C., 44, 520 fn  
 Hudson, H. N., 425, 437  
 Hugo, Victor, 17  
 Hulme, Hilda M., 651  
 Hunter, G. K., 363, 429  
 Hunter, Joseph, 49  
 Hunter, Mark, 333 ff  
 Hunt, Simon, 30  
  
 Ibsen, Henrik, xv, 6, 81, 379, 380, 469, 506, 563, 603, 612, 634, 677, 690  
*Iliad*, The, 223, 387, 415, 537  
*Il Pecorone*, 342, 343, 372, 373  
*Il Penseroso*, 300  
 Imam, Syed Mehdi, 370, 550, 596  
*Inferno* (Dante's), 512  
 Interludes, The, 115 ff, 133  
 Ionesco, Eugene, xv, 677  
 Isaacs, J., xi, 10, 475  
*Isle of Dogs*, 128  
  
*Jack Straw*, 209, 220  
 Jaggard, Isaac, 37  
 Jaggard, William, 13, 292  
 James, D. G., 405, 484, 489  
 James I, 98, 128, 501 fn  
*James IV*, 135, 136, 209, 618  
 Jameson, Mrs. Anna, 425  
 Jenkins, Harold, 43  
 Jenkins, Thomas, 30  
*Jew of Malta, The*, 117, 345  
  
*Jocasta*, 184  
 Jodelle, Etienne, 116, 183  
 Johnson, Dr. Samuel, 24, 40, 41, 48, 51, 56, 58, 237, 238, 319, 404, 460, 483, 575, 576, 630, 654, 675  
 Jones, Robert, 66  
 Jonson, Ben, 7, 13, 15, 16, 28, 30, 31, 33, 37, 70, 71, 90, 99, 128, 294, 373, 603, 611, 614, 616, 627, 646, 651  
 Joseph, Bertrand, 396  
 Jourdain, Sylvester, 598  
 Joyce, James, 25, 230, 312, 645, 646  
 Jusscrand, J. J., 683  
  
 Kabuki (of Japan), 127  
 Kalidasa, 300, 469, 560, 565, 585, 627, 649, 688  
*Kamasutra*, 363  
 Kamban (the Tamil poet), 649  
 Kaufmann, Walter, 678  
 Kean, Edmund, 483  
 Keats, John, 300, 325, 488, 489, 548, 647, 689  
 Kemball-Cook, B. H., 544 fn  
 Kemble, John Philip, 483  
 Kemp, William, 123, 170  
 Kenny, Thomas, 21 fn  
 Kermode, Frank, 47, 48, 555 fn, 563, 564 fn, 587 fn, 597 fn, 604, 607  
 Khadye, K. M., 585  
 Khrushchev, Nikita, 230  
*King Edward III*, 209, 220  
 Kirschbaum, Leo, 56  
 Kitto, H. D. F., 34, 110, 203  
 Kittredge, G. L., 21, 43, 69 ff, 605  
 Knight, G. Wilson, 89 fn, 102, 233, 284 fn, 286, 289, 316, 317, 324, 389, 410, 432, 473, 494, 502, 519 fn, 557, 567 fn, 572, 580 fn, 587 fn, 592, 596, 605, 658, 659, 663, 690  
 Knight, Charles, 42  
 Knights, L. C., 57, 318, 420, 481, 536, 550  
 Kokeritz, Helge, 18  
 Kyd, Thomas, 13, 22, 23, 75, 76, 117, 128, 130, 183, 184, 214, 399, 400, 415, 646  
*Kynge Johan*, 206 ff  
*Kumarasambhava*, 300  
  
*L'Allegro*, 300  
 Lamb, Charles, xiii, 17, 405 fn, 425, 479

- Lamb, The*, 564  
 Landor, W. S., 691  
 Lascelles, Mary, 333 fn, 434, 645  
 Law, R.A., 234  
 Lawlor, John, 197, 514 fn, 550  
 Lawrence, W. J., 399  
 Lawrence, W. W., 82, 381, 383, 384, 425, 438 fn  
*Lear of the Steppes, A*, 491-2  
 Leavis, F. R., 433, 438 fn, 464 fn, 465, 600, 603, 620  
 Leech, Clifford, xiii, 432 fn, 442 fn, 549, 573  
 Lee, Sir Sidney, 11, 310, 311  
 Le Franc, Professor, 15 fn —  
 Legge, Thomas, 209  
 Legouis, Emile, 633, 655, 689 fn  
 Leicester, Lord, 12 fn, 120, 122  
 Leishman, J. B., 309 fn  
 Leonardo da Vinci, 104, 105  
 Levin, Harry, 395, 398, 405, 482  
 Lewis, C. S., 138, 288, 321, 447, 624  
 Lewis, Wyndham, 374, 462  
 Lincoln, Abraham, 685  
 Littledale, H., 642 fn  
 Livy, 30  
 Lodge, Thomas, 13, 128, 130, 307, 356 ff, 363  
 Lodovico Dolce, 116, 183  
 Lok, Henry, 307  
 Longinus, 674  
 Looney, Thomas, 15 fn  
 Lord Berners, 222  
*Love's Martyr*, 292, 324  
*Love's Sacrifice*, 618  
 Loyola, St. Ignatius, 107  
 Lucas, F. L., 189 fn  
 Lucy, Sir Thomas, 11, 29  
 Lydgate, John, 415  
 Lyly, John, 13, 33, 130, 133 ff, 139, 214 359, 363, 667  
*Lysistrata*, 137  
 Macardle, Dorothy, 409  
 Mac Callum, M. W., 519 fn  
 Machiavelli, Niccolo, 106, 107, 110  
 Mack, Maynard, 442 fn, 495 fn, 534  
 Mackail, J. W., xv, 310 fn  
 Macphail, J. R., 56 fn  
 Madan, F., 73  
*Mahabharata, The*, 260, 266, 277, 279, 349, 414, 425, 537, 546, 562, 586, 686, 687, 689  
 Mahood, M. M., 196, 592, 654 ff  
*Maid in the Mill, The*, 628  
 Maitra, Sitansu, 333 fn  
 Malone, Edmund, 10, 12, 14, 22 fn, 29, 40 ff, 60  
 Manningham, John, 63, 364  
 Mantuan, 30  
*Marina*, 572  
 Markham, Gervase, 320  
 Marlowe, Christopher, 13, 15, 16, 20, 22 ff, 64, 69, 75, 90, 94, 99, 128, 130, 136, 214, 220, 314 fn, 342, 646, 667  
 Marston, John, 73  
 Martindale, Fr., 263  
 Martin, Graham, 629  
 Martin Luther, 93, 105, 107  
*Mary Magdalene*, 114, 567 fn  
 Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, 94  
 Masefield, John, 99, 324, 514, 615 fn  
 Maugham, Somerset, 91  
 Maupassant, Guy de, 426  
 Mauriac, Francois, 423, 424, 514, 563, 564  
 Maxwell, J. C., 190, 191, 567  
*Mayor of Casterbridge, The*, 498  
 McEachran, F., 453  
 McKerrow, R. B., 17, 43, 44, 56  
 Mc Manaway, James G., 16, 72  
 Mears, R. A. F., 280  
*Medea*, 182-3  
 Megroz, R. L., 669 fn  
 Menander, 137, 138, 140  
*Menacchi*, 32, 364  
 Menon, C. Narayana, 58 fn, 395, 396, 451  
 Meredith, George, 449  
 Meres, Francis, 64, 70, 291, 292, 307  
*Merry Devil of Edmonton, The*, 38 fn  
*Metamorphoses*, 30, 189, 291, 296, 587 fn  
 Michael Angelo, 619, 692  
*Microcosmos*, 224  
 Middleton, Thomas, 558  
 Miller, William, 486, 507  
 Milton, John, 82, 300, 561, 563, 688, 691  
 Miracle Plays, *The*, 112 ff  
*Mirror for Magistrates, A*, 64, 222, 223, 253, 471, 574  
*Misfortunes of Arthur, The*, 209  
*Moby Dick*, 537  
 Moliere, Jean Baptiste, 497  
 Monkey, 598  
 Montaigne, Michel de, 77 fn, 105, 106, 107, 110  
*Moon for the Misbegotten, A*, 564

- Morality Plays, The, 113 ff, 133  
 More, Sir Thomas, 92, 93, 115, 222  
 Morgan, Charles, 674  
 Morgann, Maurice, 17, 238, 616, 618  
 Moulton, R. G., 278, 334, 390, 508, 512, 617, 648  
*Mrichchakatika*, 585  
*Mrs. Warren's Profession*, 81  
*Mucedorus*, 38 fn, 598  
 Muir, Kenneth, xii, 48, 134, 145, 152, 168, 372, 415, 485, 488, 505 fn, 524 fn, 548, 563, 564 fn, 567 fn, 569, 597  
 Munday, Anthony, 342  
 Murray, Gilbert, 206  
 Murry, John Middleton, 197, 313, 320, 484 fn, 500, 539, 657  
  
 Nagarajan, S., 432 fn  
 Nandakumar, Prema, 469 fn  
 Nashe, Thomas, 13, 63, 128, 211, 254  
 Naylor, E. W., 669 fn  
 Neilson, W. A., 54  
 Nehru, Jawaharlal, 98  
 Nicoll, Allardyce, 8, 74, 504, 551, 615  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 317  
 Noble, Richard, 669 fn  
 Noh (of Japan), 127  
 North, Christopher, 458  
 North, Sir Thomas, 524  
 Norton, Thomas, 116  
 Nosworthy, J. M., 555 fn, 563, 669 fn  
 Novalis, 614  
  
*Oedipus at Coloneus*, 181, 689  
*Oedipus Tyrannus*, 179, 180, 513, 514  
 O'Loughlin, S., 134  
 O'Neill, Eugene, xv, 212, 563, 564, 645, 646  
*Oresteia*, The, 176, 178, 179, 208, 559  
*Ortho-Epla-Gallica*, 159, 163  
*Orlando Furioso*, 351  
 Orwell, George, 656  
 Ottakkoothan (the Tamil poet), 649  
 Ovid, 30, 33, 76, 132, 168, 189, 291, 294, 363, 589 fn  
 Oxford, Lord (Edward de Vere), 14, 15, 320, 443  
  
 Pafford, J. H. P., 555 fn, 587 fn, 594 fn  
 Painter, William, 301, 422  
*Palace of Pleasure, The*, 301, 422  
*Palladis Tamia*, 64  
 Palmer, John, 279, 281, 286, 350  
*Pandosto*, 562, 587  
*Pan Tadeusz*, 223  
*Paradise Lost*, 268, 288, 561  
 Paris, Jean, 5, 109, 110  
 Paris, Matthew, 215  
 Parker, M. D. H., 423, 485, 504 fn, 559, 564  
 Parrott, T. M., 21, 25, 32 fn, 69, 71, 74, 333, 387, 476, 501, 632  
 Partridge, Eric, 651 fn  
 Pasternak, Boris, xv  
 Pater, Walter, 230  
 Pavier, Thomas, 36  
 Peele, George, 13, 20, 22, 23, 75, 117, 128, 130, 133 ff, 211, 214, 220  
 Pembroke, The Countess of, 14  
 Pembroke's Men, 75 ff, 123, 130  
*Perikeiromene*, 137  
*Persians*, The, 34, 203 ff, 210, 211, 223  
*Philanira*, 430  
*Philaster*, 214, 556, 561, 562  
 Philip II of Spain, 93, 94  
 Phillips, G. W., 320  
*Pillars of Society, The*, 379  
 Pinerio, A. W., 81  
 Pinter, Harold, xv  
 Pitcher, Seymour M., 211 fn  
 Platter, Thomas, 62, 64, 70  
 Plautus, 32, 76, 117, 132, 133, 138 ff, 144, 145, 364, 566  
*Play*, 645  
 Plimpton, George A., 29, 30  
 Plutarch, 33, 387, 388, 524, 539, 541, 544, 562, 627, 629  
 Pogson, Beryl, 550  
 Pollard, A. W., 17 ff, 39, 43, 44, 61 fn, 65, 111, 113, 115  
 Polydore Vergil, 222  
 Pope, Alexander, 39, 40, 48, 678  
*Possessed, The*, 638  
 Powys, John Cowper, 690 fn  
 Price, H. T., 254  
 Prince, F. T., 308  
*Prometheus Bound*, 179  
*Promos and Cassandra*, 431  
 Prouty, C. T., 21 fa, 351  
 Prudentius Clemens, 567  
*Psychomachia*, 567  
*Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 598

Queen Elizabeth, 6, 15, 63, 98,  
171 fn, 409, 472  
Queen Mary, 93  
Quennell, Peter, 309 fn, 319,  
462 fn, 492 fn, 510 fn  
Quiller-Couch, Sir A. T., 43, 58,  
156, 157, 240, 285, 338, 349,  
373, 375, 428, 555 fn, 556, 567,  
575, 581, 584 fn, 597, 605, 636  
  
Rabelais, Francois, 689  
Racine, Jean, 563, 603  
Raleigh, Sir Walter, 11 fn, 25, 73,  
97, 310, 346, 571, 576, 612  
Raleigh, Sir Walter, 14, 93, 159,  
160, 224, 528  
*Ramayana*, The, 6, 111, 142, 398,  
424, 483, 562, 582, 649, 686,  
687, 688, 692  
*Ramlila*, 111  
Ransom, John Crowe, 629 fn, 653  
Ralli, Augustus, xii  
*Ralph Roister Doister*, 117, 133  
Reed, A. W., 115 fn  
Rees, D. G., 318  
Reese, M. M., 26 ff, 31, 77, 96 ff,  
115 fn, 127, 208, 217, 235, 248,  
263, 291, 294, 681  
Rembrandt, 563  
Rennaissance, The, 92, 692  
*Respublica*, 255  
*Returne from Parnassus*, The, 294  
Revels Account, The, 62 ff, 68-9  
Ribner, Irving, 196, 548  
Richards, I. A., 325  
Riche, Barnaby, 365  
Righter, Anne, 610 fn  
*Ritusamhara*, 300  
Robertson, J. M., 10 fn, 22 ff, 618  
Roche, Walter, 30  
Rogers, J. D., 600 fn  
*Rosalynde*, 356  
Rose, H. J., 137  
Rosen, William, 549  
*Rosmersholm*, 379, 469  
Rossiter, A. P., 184, 185, 207, 220,  
222 fn, 225, 241, 245, 352, 384,  
396, 404, 422, 427, 435, 443,  
451 fn, 460 fn, 480, 503, 549  
Rouillet, Claude, 430  
Rouse, W. H. D., 30 fn  
Rowe, Nicholas, 29, 39  
Rowley, William, 128  
Rowse, A. L., xiv, 122, 160 fn,  
171 fn, 319 ff, 471, 510 fn, 528  
*Rudens*, 566  
Ruskin, John, 338

Rutland, The Earl of, 14, 15  
Rylands, George, 77, 78, 661 fn,  
666  
Rymer, Thomas, 465  
  
Sackville, Thomas, 116, 666  
Saintsbury, George, xiii, 674  
Salisbury, Sir John, 292  
Sampson, George, 379, 383, 690  
*Samson Agonistes*, 531, 561  
*Sanctuary*, 456  
Sanders, Norman, 135, 136  
Sargent, Ralph M., 190  
Sarrazin, G., 67  
Sastri, V. S. Srinivasa, 686  
*Savitri*, 624, 674 fn  
Saxo Grammaticus, 399, 415  
Sayers, Dorothy, 385 fn, 394 fn  
Schanzer, Ernest, 83, 381, 383,  
384, 387 fn, 519 fn, 535 fn  
Schucking, Levin, xii, 17, 522, 617,  
620, 626, 644  
*Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, The, 81  
Seaver, Richard, 6 fn  
Sen, Sailendra Kumar, 17 fn,  
658 fn  
Seneca, 34, 76, 117, 132, 182 ff  
*Seven Against Thebes*, The, 179  
Sewall, Arthur, 491, 549  
Sewall, Richard B., 413, 451  
Seymour-Smith, Martin, 309 fn,  
320 ff  
*Shadow of the Night*, The, 66, 160,  
314 fn  
Shahani, Ranjee, 326

# SHAKESPEARE (FAMILY)

Anne (Hathaway), 11, 25, 28  
Hamnet, 11, 29  
John, 11, 26, 31  
Judith, 11, 13, 28, 29  
Mary Arden, 11  
Susanna, 11, 13, 25, 26, 28

# SHAKESPEARE, WILLIAM

ART:  
'appearance' and 'reality', 634  
'art' and 'nature', 620  
'bawdy', 651 fn  
central Acts, 635  
character development, 639  
clowns and fools, 638  
development of blank verse,  
666 ff  
evolution of dramatic art, 84 ff  
handling of sources, 627 ff  
Imagery, 656 ff



**PLAYS (attributed to Shakespeare):**

- Contention, The*, 20, 21, 36, 55, 293  
*Lochrine*, 38, 208  
*London Prodigal, The*, 38  
*Puritan, The*, 38  
*Sir Thomas More*, 18, 209, 599  
*Sir John Oldcastle*, 36, 38  
*Taming of a Shrew, The*, 21, 36, 145, 147, 293  
*Thomas Lord Cromwell*, 38  
*Troublesome Raigne, The*, 21, 36, 213 ff, 217 fn, 293  
*True Tragedie, The*, 20, 21, 61  
*Two Noble Kinsmen, The*, 38 fn, 71, 599, 679  
*Yorkshire Tragedie, A*, 36, 38
- Shaw, Bernard, xv, 81, 379, 381, 687  
 Shelley, P. B., 552  
 Shirley, James, 666  
 Sidney, Sir Philip, 64, 159, 307, 472, 555, 566  
*Silappadhikaram*, 144  
 Silvayn, Alexander, 342  
 Simpson, Percy, 18, 47, 145, 184, 189 fn, 400, 566 fn  
 Sisson, C. J., 8, 32, 35, 43, 48 fn, 52, 53, 58, 59, 130, 684 fn  
 Sitwell, Osbert, 326  
 Smart, J. S., xvi, 20, 26, 29, 191, 377, 549  
 Smith, Adam, 41  
 Smith, David Nichol, 41, 616 fn  
 Smith, L. P., 650  
 Smithwick, John, 37  
 Smith, William, 307  
 Somerville, H., xiv, 484, 641  
*Song of Roland, The*, 139  
 Sophocles, 34, 107, 117, 179, 181, 603, 611, 627, 637, 649, 682  
 Southampton, The Countess of, 171 fn, 311  
 Southampton, The Earl of, 77 fn, 159, 302, 311, 312, 320  
*Spanish Tragedy, The*, 117, 184, 400  
 Spencer, T. J. B., xv, 171 fn, 540, 542  
 Spencer, Theodore, 104, 106, 404, 410, 419, 466, 470, 487, 494, 689, 690  
 Spenser, Edmund, 15, 33, 64, 293, 314 fn

- Spurgeon, Caroline F. E., 194, 410, 458, 659 ff  
 St. Augustine, 564  
 St. John Chrysostom, 610 fn  
 St. Matthew, 432  
 St. Paul, 518  
 St. Thomas Aquinas, 564  
 Stanley, William (Earl of Derby), 14, 15, 131, 171 fn  
*Stationers' Register, The*, 62 ff, 68, 328, 562, 565  
 Stauffer, Donald A., 79, 81, 82, 495, 535, 564 fn, 600, 676  
 Steevens, George, 7, 40, 42, 48  
 Steiner, George, 551, 636  
 Sternfeld, F. W., 232, 384, 669 fn  
 Stewart, J. I. M., xii, 239 fn, 392, 460 fn, 481, 484, 488, 522 fn, 593, 620, 625, 676, 685 fn  
 Stewart, William, 505  
 Still, Colin, 601  
 Stoll, E. E., 17, 200 fn, 238 fn, 375 fn, 428, 460 fn, 617, 618, 620, 644  
 Stopes, Mrs. C. C., 505  
 Strachey, Lytton, xiii, 11 fn, 16, 58, 67, 73, 466, 542, 557, 584 fn, 646, 654 fn, 667  
 Strachey, William, 598  
 Strange, Lord, 15, 76  
*Strange Interlude*, 645  
 Street, Peter, 124  
 Subbarau, Rental Venkata, 399  
 Sudraka, 585  
*Suppliants, The*, 204  
 Surrey, The Earl of, 307  
 Sutherland, James, 671, 672  
 'Swan', The, 123, 125, 128  
 Swinburne, A. C., 17, 575, 576  
 Symons, Arthur, 520
- Tagore, Rabindranath, 6, 27  
 Taine, Hippolyte, 618  
*Tamburlaine*, 94, 117  
 Tate, Nahum, 483  
 Ten Brink, 556  
 Tennyson, Alfred Lord, 521  
 Terence, 118, 133, 138, 139  
*Testament of Beauty, The*, 641 fn  
 'Theatre', The, 122, 131  
 Theobald, Lewis, 39, 40, 47, 48, 53, 55, 56  
 Therese, 514  
 Thiselton, Alfred, 45, 50  
 Thompson, Sir Edward Maunde, 18  
 Thomson, J. A. K., 32, 33  
 Thorndike, A. H., 214, 556, 685

- Thorpe, Thomas, 292, 306 ff  
*Thor, with Angels*, 604  
*Thyestes*, 183, 189  
 Tieck, L., 615  
 Tillyard, E. M. W., 21, 82, 100,  
 190, 211 fn, 214, 220, 222 fn,  
 234, 252, 257, 264 fn, 282, 329,  
 333 fn, 381, 415, 428, 431, 557,  
 585  
 Titherley, A. W., 15 fn  
 Titian, 619  
 Tofte, Robert, 64, 307  
 Tolstoy, Leo, 6, 223, 690  
*Tottel's Miscellany*, 307  
 Tonson, Jacob, 39  
*Touch of the Poet, A*, 212  
 Traversi, Derek, 322, 519 fn  
 Trevelyan, G. M., 253  
 Trilling, Lionel, 86  
*Troades*, 182, 185  
 Turgenev, Ivan, 491, 492  
 Turner, Eva, 15 fn  
 Twine, Laurence, 566  
*Two on a Tower*, 692  
 Tyler, Thomas, 309 fn, 320  
  
 Udall, Nicholas, 117  
*Ulysses*, 230, 305, 312, 645  
 'University Wits', The, 13, 73,  
 128, 133, 185, 209  
 Upanishads, The, 409  
 Ure, Peter, 202, 232, 625  
*Utopia*, 92  
*Uttara Rama Charita*, 585  
  
 Valmiki, 6, 469, 553, 645, 686 ff,  
 692  
 Van Doren, Mark, 285, 316, 424,  
 499 fn, 538, 575, 590  
 Vaughan, C. E., 180  
 Virgil, 30, 688  
 von Hofmannsthal, Hugo, 114  
 Vyasa, 679, 686 ff  
 Vyvyan, John, 160 fn, 333 fn, 396,  
 397, 434, 561, 676  
  
 Wade-Gery, Henry Theodore, 223  
 Wain, John, 681  
 Waith, Eugene M., 117  
 Walker, Alice, 38  
 Walker, Roy, 503  
 Walsingham, Thomas (Marlowe's  
 patron), 16  
 Walter, J. H., 247  
  
*War and Peace*, 224, 690  
 Washington, George, 685  
 Watson, Thomas, 307  
 Warburton, William, 40, 48  
 Warton, Thomas, 616  
 Webster, John, 13, 90  
 Webster, Margaret, 80, 83  
 Weekley, Ernest, 650  
 Weever, John, 64, 293  
 West, Benjamin, 489  
*Westward for Smelts*, 574  
 Wharton, Edith, 86  
 Whateley, Anne, 15, 25, 26  
 Whately, Thomas, 616  
 Wheatley, Henry B., 91, 97 fn  
*When We Dead Awaken*, 506  
 Whetstone, George, 431  
 Whibley, Charles, 97  
 Whitehead, A. N., 104  
 Whiter, Walter, 658 fn  
 Whitgift, Archbishop, 292  
*Wild Duck, The*, 81, 379  
 Wilde, Oscar, 7, 311  
 Wilkins, George, 566  
 Willecock, Gladys D., 130, 666  
 William, David, 602  
 Williams, Charles, 63 fn, 68  
 Williams, Tennessee, xv  
*Willobie his Avisa*, 315  
 Willoughby, E. E., 38  
 Wilson, F. P., 33, 90, 214, 613,  
 651, 653, 659 fn  
 Wilson, John Dover, xvi, 1, 11 fn,  
 17, 19, 20, 22, 23 fn, 24, 33 fn,  
 35, 43, 48, 58 ff, 74, 77 fn, 214,  
 230, 234, 238, 283, 300, 309 fn,  
 320 ff, 351, 352, 375 fn, 377,  
 409, 505, 564 fn, 593, 597 fn,  
 602, 619, 691  
 Winny, James, 101 fn  
 Wise, Andrew, 61  
*Woodstock*, 209, 212, 220, 225  
 Wolsey, Cardinal, 15, 139 fn  
 Wordsworth, William, 104, 563,  
 691  
 Wotton, Sir Henry, 63  
 Wright, Louis B., xii  
 Wright, W. A., 11  
*Wuthering Heights*, 464  
 Wyatt, Alfred J., 575, 580 fn  
 Wyatt, Sir Thomas, 307  
 Wynyard, Diana, 595  
  
 Yates, Frances A., 159, 163  
 Yeats, W. B., 563











